

1101: The Healing Effects of Winter- Fascinating Science With Carrie Bennett

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Child: Welcome to my Mommy’s podcast.

Katie: This episode is brought to you by Hiya Health, which I have a now extended and renewed interest in, especially with having a baby around who will be starting solid foods pretty soon. Because here's something that's kept me up at night as a parent, and I've talked about before. Our kids are the first generation growing up on not just ultra-processed foods, but foods that don't have the same nutrient content that they used to due to soil changes and so many other factors.

In fact, we're just beginning to understand the extent of this problem. And this is why Hiya exists and why I'm glad that they do, which is to give parents a real solution in a market that is flooded with kids' vitamins that are actually contributing to the ultra-processed foods. They have candy-like appeal, but not actual nutrition.

In fact, some children's vitamins on the market contain up to seven grams of sugar per serving and are stuffed with additives and petroleum-based dyes that I go to great lengths to avoid in my kids' diet. So Hiya took the opposite approach with zero sugar, zero gummy additives, just clean nutrition. And the great part is kids actually love them.

My younger kids are a huge fan. I have tried them, and the flavor is actually great, although obviously I don't take them daily. But what makes them different is how thoughtfully they are designed, formulated to meet very specific nutritional gaps that modern kids face. And they worked alongside pediatrician and nutrition specialists to make a chewable multivitamin that packs a blend of twelve organic fruits and vegetables and fills the common nutrient gaps that kids face.

They're also non-GMO, vegan, dairy-free, allergy-free, gelatin-free, nut-free. They really have thought of everything to make these ideal for kids. And they are NSF certified and receive Clean Label Project's Highest Purity Award. So when it comes to something I feel safe giving my kids, they are definitely on the list.

It's designed for kids two and up. They ship straight to your door. And I love that they send you a reusable bottle and stickers with your first order. So this helps you keep up with the refills, and they send refills every month as well. I am a big fan of these as well. And Hiya just launched something new.

If your kids are active and growing, you can add a clean protein powder with minerals designed just for kids to be exactly what they need. Their new Kids Daily Growth Plus Protein is a game-changer. It's more than a protein shake. It's a purity awarded clean protein powder with added minerals and healthy fats that can mix right into water or smoothies and support muscle development and cognition and fuel everything else they've got going on.

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So, we worked out a special deal with Hiya. You can receive 50% off your first order on any of their products. To claim this deal, you must go to hiyahealth.com/wellnessmama. This deal is not available on their regular website. So again, that's H-I-Y-A-H-E-A-L-T-H.com/wellnessmama, and get your kids the full body support they deserve.

This episode is sponsored by BON CHARGE, and specifically one of my favorite things that they have, which is their PEMF mini mat. If you are new to PEMF, this stands for pulsed electromagnetic field, which is magnetic energy that's being sent into the body via this mat. And these energy waves are fascinating.

They work with your body's natural magnetic field to elevate your wellbeing in a multitude of ways. Similar effect that we would have from being in direct contact with the earth, which I also think is an amazing thing to do daily. I love PEMF mats to improve sleep, to ground me, to increase calmness.

I often say that sitting on one of these mats, I feel like a cat in the sunshine and just, like, so calm and cozy. Some of the reasons I personally like this particular mini mat, it is small enough to fit in any room, and it's easy to move from room to room. I also have a larger one, but that one is more difficult to move around.

There are different settings, so you can find what works best for you, and it's low EMF. Some of these are not. I feel like this is an important thing to pay attention to. Some easy ways that you can use a mini mat like this: it's great on an office chair or on a sofa or on the floor, wherever you are sitting and reading, meditating, working, et cetera.

I love to use it before bedtime or after a workout or I'm actually doing yoga teacher training. I'll often use it during restorative classes or when you need kind of like a creative boost or a brain reset. And like I said, I love how portable this one is. You can find out more about it and get a discount by using the code wellnessmama at wellnessmama.com/go/boncharge

Katie: Hello, and welcome to the Wellness Mama Podcast. I'm Katie from wellnessmama.com, and I am so excited for today's conversation with the incredible Carrie Bennett, who is an expert on so many things. And she's one of the leading voices in circadian health, which you guys have heard me talk about quite a lot.

But I am deeply excited to learn from Carrie's wisdom on this topic. She knows so much more than I do, and she's been helping people for 20 years. And in this first topic, we're gonna take a little bit of a controversial and fun topic, which is the healing effects of winter,

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which might even be a surprising title to some people. So Carrie, welcome, and thank you so much for being here.

Carrie: Oh, thanks for having me, Katie. I'm excited to dive in.

Katie: Me too, because when researching for this, you made the statement that winter doesn't have to feel miserable. And I will say that's something I now have context for, but for years would've disagreed with you about until I understood circadian biology a little bit more, and I still am not scratching the surface of what you know.

People have heard me talk a lot about the importance of sunlight. I'm very team sunlight. And so I think it's well worth it that we're gonna devote some time to the benefits of winter, which actually dovetail, I think, perfectly with this. I know this is a deep and nuanced topic, so maybe for some background, can you just, give us some understanding of what do you even mean by that statement that winter doesn't have to be miserable for everyone who maybe has experienced, like, seasonal affective disorder in their past?

Carrie: Right. It's, that's a great starting point, because I also used to experience seasonal affective disorder. I'm c- I have been for the past, 25 years now i- in southwest Michigan. It gets dark, it gets cold, and we get dumped on with lake-effect snow. So, you know, I would dread... Like, this time of year, especially w- after we approach that time change, I would just be like, "Ugh, now I'm just gonna feel awful for the next, oh, four, basically until March or April rolls around," you know?

And, I started to realize, like, wait a second. As I began more getting more familiar with circadian biology, and then not just circadian, but circannual rhythms, I started to live in con- i- in more connection with my light-dark environment and with the seasonal variations. I recognize that winter wasn't actually designed to make us miserable.

It's just that I was attempting to, and I think many others, just try to live winter like it's perpetual summer. And in doing so, we're creating this mismatch in our bodies that our bodies recognize. And so when I started to align, basically prepare my body for winter, and align more then with what I call winter's healing gifts, which we can dive into, I started to realize, oh my goodness, I, I was giving myself seasonal depression.

I was becoming miserable because I wasn't adapting myself to the cold. I wasn't appreciating the darkness and what it, how it could serve my healing. And it wasn't pathological for me to not wanna go out with my friends at 8:00 at night, you know, on a Friday in the middle of December. And I was, you know, kinda judging my lifestyle and for, and how I was feeling.

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But I was just recognizing that my body was s- responding in an, a seasonal, seasonally appropriate way. And so now my goal is to spread the word. Like, I want everyone who thinks winter will make them miserable to know that there's a better way.

Katie: I love this because I had a similar experience. It took me probably a lot longer than it took you, and I'm still, I feel like, working on really dialing that in.

So I think this episode is perfect timing for any of us in this hemisphere that are gonna be moving into those shorter light windows soon. So I'd love to understand more deeply, like, what is happening physiologically? Like, what is happening in our body that's shifting when the light window starts to become shorter and we're not getting as much sunlight and light cues throughout the day?

Carrie: Perfect. So this actually starts as we get to the autumnal equinox. At that point, when daylight equals darkness and then the body starts to sense that the darkness is increasing, the daylight is shrinking, we're preparing for scarcity. And what-- as our body prepares for p- you know, potential scarcity, it down regulates things.

So during the fall months, I've seen such-- what I, at the time, you know, 15, 20 years ago, before I really dove into circadian and mitochondrial physiology circannual rhythms, I would be like, "Oh my gosh, why is your thy- why are your thyroid mark- markers all of a sudden, you know, quote unquote, 'tanking?'" I, I don't know why your blood sugar is becoming-- why you're becoming more insulin resistant.

And then I began to realize that if we didn't have built-in programs to prepare for potential scarcity in the fall, then we would not have survived the winter. And so the fall months are a moment where the body says, "Oh, wow, there's plentiful-- Like, look at th- this abundant harvest. Let's take this abundant harvest and nourish ourselves.

But at the same time, let's do some things that down regulate our metabolic function in order to take that nourishment and tuck it away for later." So I will s- I will. I'll see changes in, in, blood glucose. I'll see changes in thyroid numbers. It is so common for me to hear people say, "I just start to get really tired and sluggish this time of year.

Just kind of feels I wanna, you know, kind of just like really wanna rest all the time." Not pathological. It's the innate wisdom that's built into your body because it recognizes that the season has changed and has shifted. And so then if we were to live a, quote unquote, "true winter", I'm not saying you have to be outside, right, you know, and, and just be freezing all the time.

But if we were to live a true winter and build in periods of cold adaptation, maybe strategic scarcity, there's nuance to that, understanding the darkness. If we were to, actually

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coordinate our kinda like winter lifestyle with certain key habits, our body uses certain signals to heal the insulin resistance to, to start to become a better fat burner, which generates heat for us, which reduces inflammation, which allows us to come out in the spring, just like, you know, come April time, these fully refreshed beings.

But we just don't take advantage of it 'cause like, like I said, we just try to live w- in, in disalignment, in misalignment because we're living perpetually indoors, light on all the time, heat cranked to 72 in the winter, when I think there's, again, a better way.

Katie: This is so fascinating to me, and I think even just that reframe alone of understanding that there are benefits to these changes that are happening into winter is a really important paradigm shift for approaching it differently and having a different mindset around it, which also probably then ripples so much into our actual felt experience of winter as well.

And I'm curious because I've talked a lot about how, for instance, artificial light at night can tell our body it's midday when it's not and be problematic. Do things like that get amplified in the winter? Like, if we're... Does that signal more of a perpetual summer? Like, what are some of the big cues that can be really dramatically impactful in a negative way during winter?

Carrie: Oh, it's so interesting. So yes, it does, right? So part of the darkness is increased melatonin. And as you alluded to, that if we're getting, if we're under artificial light up until 8:00, 9:00, 10:00, 11:00 o'clock at night, that's a substantial amount of melatonin that our body is not being able to produce.

Why does that matter? Well, number one, it matters because melatonin not only puts us to sleep, but it runs key repair programs when we are asleep, such as autophagy, which goes into our cells and recycles damaged parts so that we can build back new, better ones, and apoptosis, which selectively kills off cells that are too inflamed, too damaged to be meaningfully beneficial to our tissues anymore.

So these are, like, really key maintenance programs. The other thing melatonin is, is it's o- one of our most potent intracellular antioxidants. It goes in then and repairs that, a- a- any sort of damage. It repairs mitochondria. And missing out on it during the winter months bec- wh- when we have the opportunity to make more of it, I think that is absolutely to our detriment.

The other thing that I think is an issue is we, this, again, this is a seasonal mismatch. We think we need elevated vitamin D all winter long, and it never made sense to me because where I live in Michigan, I literally could not, I don't have the UVB light, the stronger UV light to make vitamin D through my skin from October through the beginning of March.

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And so I always thought, "Why would I need high amounts of vitamin D if I couldn't make it during the winter?" And a paper came out in about, in about 2023 that showed that melatonin binds to the vitamin D receptor, meaning in the winter, we have melatonin exerting the same beneficial effects that vitamin D would do for us in the summer. Things like balancing out inflammation, things like, im- so improving gene expression, basically just optimizing various different pathways in our body.

You know, for example, our im- quote-unquote "immune system", right? All these things, we assumed it was vitamin D that did it. And yeah, vitamin D does it during the summer. Melatonin takes over in the winter. And so if we can start to maximize melatonin in the winter and view winter as melato- the melatonin season, summer as the vitamin D season, it makes so much more sense.

And I'm gonna add to that another layer because not only do we make melatonin in response to darkness, but we also make it during the daytime in response to having our body exposed to near-infrared light. And that near-infrared light, it can penet- it can penetrate some clothing, like light- lightweight clothing, but we would've been around it continuously if we were indoors during the day with campfire.

And nowadays, our modern lighting completely omits it. I'm certain you've talked about our LED bulbs, right? And the fact that they've got none of those beneficial wavelengths. So w- w- and frankly, 95% of the melatonin we're designed to make is that melatonin that's made inside of our cells in response to near-infrared light.

So that near-infrared light penetrates our cells. Our mitochondria make melatonin for us during the day. That melatonin cleans d- it cleans house all day long. My favorite analogy here is, yes, we've got pineal melatonin, and yes, it can clean house, but I liken it to running a daycare. And you run a daycare, and you got kids, and they're leaving their crumbs everywhere, the toys, you know.

There's something smeared on the wall over here, right? It ... And all ... And ideally what we're doing as we're running that daycare, it, or household for, for that matter , we're cl- we're, we're slowly just picking up. We're teaching the kids to put away their things. Like, we're, we're, we're wiping counters down.

We're cleaning up all day long so that when it's nighttime and the deep-cleaning crew comes in, they can scrub the baseboards. They can do those, those deep cleaning strategies like mop the floors, the strategies that we may not have time to do for during the day but need to run on a consistent basis to have optimum health.

And so if we can get that near-infrared exposure during the day and then optimize the pineal melatonin at night with darkness, it's full-on cleaning crew 24/7.

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Katie: And I definitely want to go deeper on that, but before we move on, I want to talk a little bit more about vitamin D because this is a big misconception I see a lot.

I was told for years, especially when I had thyroid stuff going on, to take a lot of vitamin D because mine was chronically low. So I followed doctor's advice and did that, felt worse. My vitamin D did not go up. It wasn't until I dialed in my light environment and got it from the sun that now it, during the summer, hovers around 86 and stays there flawlessly with no supplements.

But I'm curious to know more about oral vitamin D and what your take is on that, 'cause I would guess many people have gotten similar advice and are taking pretty big doses of vitamin D trying to get their levels up and probably stay there all year.

Carrie: Yes. It's a very common recommendation because we have that idea that we need...

There's been a there's been population-wide studies that have been done, and it, the population-wide studies say, "Oh, look, vitamin D is lower in the win- is basically lower in the winter." And we also then see autoimmune conditions flare, or we see, added inflammatory conditions, you know, that quote, unquote, "flare in the winter."

I'm gonna guarantee you if we also tested that population, melatonin would be low across the board as well, simply because no one is blocking artificial light or maximizing daytime melatonin production. So they took a correlation, in my opinion, and made it a causation. The interesting thing, like you experienced, is that when they've done really, really large, large population-wide studies on vitamin D supplementation, that actually got vitamin D up to what they wanted to see in blood labs, so above 50 or 60.

It provided no actual beneficial effects or minimal beneficial effects when it comes, when it came to, supporting symptom burden. And in fact, in some populations, such as certain elderly populations, it actually increased not only fall risk, but fracture from fall risk. So you have to ask yourselves, "Okay, I thought having a certain amount of vitamin D would prevent all these things and make me feel better," and it just didn't.

And they've done studies where they actually... These are animal studies, not humans, so I wanna be clear on that. But they took two different th- animal, basically pigs. They gave pigs vitamin D supplementation to get to a certain blood level, and then they exposed them to UVB light to get to that same blood level.

Same blood level. The UVB light population actually had improved biomarkers that they were tracking, where the ones that were supplemented with vitamin D did not. So it, it tells you, yes, vitamin D may matter, but how we get it matters, I think, even more. And

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understanding that if we don't have access to it from light during the winter, our body is flipping to a different metabolism, and we need to support it more so with melatonin.

One more layer in there on the vitamin D story is when we're tested, when we test vitamin D, we, when you get your vitamin D tested from your physician, they test one marker. And we now know that there's at least 33 different vitamin D metabolites in both what are called fat-soluble form and water-soluble form, which is...

And, and so when you test one vitamin D marker and you say your vitamin D is low from that- It's what we used to do with thyroid as well, but even worse, when we would just test TSH and assume something really profound from just that marker, as opposed to things that could be happening upstream or downstream of that marker.

And so to me, it's a very incomplete picture. And when I have people recognize and start to shift over into winter mode with melatonin, they don't have any desire to... They're, they're, they don't feel like they need vitamin D. And in fact, like you said, vitamin D, because it's a hormone, it's a secosteroid, it's a steroid hormone, you can take it...

Some people notice a benefit if they take it for, oh, five days, seven days. Same way that if you get whatever it's called, like a Z-Pak or something, and you take s- it's like a steroid pack that you take if you, if you, if you feel sick, that sometimes people say they got a lot of energy when they're taking that steroid.

Certainly. It can be an energizing effect, but long term it's high- it can be highly dysregulating. And a lot of people to, when they go long term on that vitamin D supplementation, they ultimately end up feeling worse than when they started.

Katie: That makes so much sense to me. And I've talked about before how we think about sunlight in the summer and UV.

That gets talked about the most, and there are all the debates about tanning and burning and all the problems that come with it. But it's important to remember that UV, even in the peak of summer, is only a small percentage of the overall light that we're getting from the sun. And you mentioned infrared, which the sun, just my understanding, always has available.

So we're still getting that signal in winter, and that seems to be the one that really impacts the body. So perhaps it's not the vitamin D level, like you just explained. It's actually all the cascading benefits that come from that broad-spectrum light, of which vitamin D levels optimizing is like a side effect versus the actual just single mechanism that's happening.

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Carrie: 100%. I, I believe that completely. Yes, we want that UV light. Yes, it does beautiful things. But there's a reason why the sunlight, even on a cloudy, snowy day, is at least 40% in the infrared spectrum. I think that does so much for our health, from making subcellular melatonin to a lot of other things as well that we might not have time to get into in this particular chat.

But I think it's that exact... And, also campfire, right? It's, it's divorcing ourselves from those full-spectrum sources of infrared that have been very detrimental.

Katie: Yeah, I've seen interesting data, even with people just reintroducing infrared sources within their home and feeling a difference. And I know that's anecdotal, but also, like, we are the most valuable study we will ever do is of our, our own biology.

And so, I love that you bring light to this topic, no pun intended. And I'd love to, like, shift gears. I have a feeling a lot of my other questions are gonna fall under the umbrella of practical ways we can actually prepare for winter, and how do we navigate it in a way that really supports what our body wants to do in winter?

And I have a feeling we'll talk about perhaps cold and fasting and AMPK and lots of things within that. But if someone's prep in the past has just been dread winter and hate that it gets cold, what would be a more optimal way for us to start to approach this as we're now, like, moving into the season?

Carrie: This is the perfect time, right? So as we're moving into the season, and again, I think social media does, does cold, cold adaptation a disservice because what we think of, what, what we typically see on social media when we have to get the benefit of the cold is someone into an ice bath up to, like, you know, up to their chin for, like, you know, five minutes, right?

You know, or longer for some people. You do not have to do that in order to get the benefit of adapting to the cold. And in fact, for many people, that is way too stressful. So what I encourage my clients in my community to do is to start to use the changing ambient air temperature to their advantage.

We have a specific, we have a couple ways that we sense cold. First and foremost, we actually have this, a different type of skin on our forehead, palms of our hands, and soles of our feet. It's called glabrous skin. It's got really specific cold receptors. So if we start to expose even just our face to the cold, right, we can start to s- our, our brain and body will start to sense the temperature difference.

But you can amplify that because we also have a special type of fat inside of our bodies that senses the cold. It's called brown adipose tissue, or brown fat. It's not like the

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pinchable white fat that you get under the skin. So but it, it's brown fat because it's full of mitochondria. Mitochondria turn it brown.

And those, th- that brown fat lives on our, like, basically near our collarbones, on the tops of our shoulders, down our back. And so in ambient air, my strategy for my clients is, okay, let's say it's all of a sudden, you know, it gets to be 60 or 55 degrees outside. Just still go outside in a lightweight shirt, maybe a long-sleeve shirt, maybe a short-sleeve shirt, and stay out there until you start to sense the cold.

I have clients wear a hairdo just like yours, right? We wrap it up and we put it right on the top of our head, if they have long hair, to be able to expose this area where the brown adipose tissue is to the fact that there is maybe like a little wind or something that can s- that where we can better sense the cold.

What will happen over time is our brown adipose tissue mitochondria become more active. And by... And they also multiply. They get greater, meaning that, that those brown adipose tissue mitochondria, they are designed, when we sense cold, they're designed to take fat from storage, the, the pinchable white fat.

They're designed to take fat from storage and burn that fat and generate heat for us. And we f- we, the scientific community for forever, thought that adults don't have brown fat anymore. And but we, they knew for, they've known for a long time that babies are born with tons of brown fat. It makes sense.

Why would a baby have a ton of brown fat? Well, a baby would have a ton of brown fat because if baby is cold, baby can't get up and change the thermostat. Baby can't get up and put on a sweater. Baby can't even shiver. Like at a certain point, right, babies don't have the muscular coordination to even shiver to generate heat, which is a highly inefficient way to generate heat, and the vast majority of us are doing that.

And so babies have this brown adipose tissue so they can regulate their temperature internally. And when they did scans of adults, they said, "Oh yeah, adults don't appear to have it. Like, it looks like they don't have it." Then a researcher said, "Well, let's expose this adult who looks like they don't have it to a bout of cold and then re-scan them."

And on that re-scan, that brown adipose tissue popped right on out like a Christmas tree, right? You could see it light up. So what we now know is the vast majority of us adults have dormant brown adipose tissue because of the fact that we live in comfortable temperature all the time. And if we can build in that, that cold, those little cold exposures throughout the course of the fall, that brown adipose tissue wakes up, and we start to be better generators of heat.

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And I've had people, you know, my mom is always my first guinea pig on all this. I love her to death. She's always my first guinea pig on all this. I said, "Mom, this winter," this was years ago, right? "Would you just, when you go out at sunrise," she was already doing sunrise, "just, like, don't wear your sweater.

Just go out in your nightshirt and just see." And she would go out in her nightshirt starting in the fall, and she could stay out at first for like, you know- 10 minutes, 20 minutes. By the middle of winter, with, there was snow on the ground, she did have slippers on, she was out there with her nightshirt on for, oh, I don't know, 30 minutes with really cold Michigan weather without feeling cold because her body was able to generate the heat from within.

So we absolutely can use the cold air as a means of supporting this adaptation. It's just about consistent exposures throughout the fall to do so.

Katie: That's so fascinating, and it makes sense to me, and I would guess most people have never considered that because we have the ability in the modern world to live in such a temperature-controlled, light-controlled, comfort-controlled environment all the time.

And I would guess a lot of people are excited to hear it does not mean 38-degree cold plunges all the time, which I know can especially be, like, really stressful for women. Like, when I was in my active healing phase, that was too much for my body. I was not doing high-intensity exercise, high-intensity cold exposure, any of that.

It was all very gentle and learning to, like, how do I support my body very gently and nurturing right now. I'd love to go deeper on the light topic as well, because people have probably heard me say so many times about getting morning light exposure, getting bright midday signaling when possible, low lights after sunset, and I would guess this is, there's a way to adapt this in the winter to really maximize this healing window.

So is it still beneficial to get morning sunlight? Is it still beneficial to go outside? What are... If we're trying to kind of, like, optimize our winter, what would that look like?

Carrie: Yeah. So for light optimization in the winter, it is still about getting that natural light signal. We do typically have to be more protective then of light, artificial light before sunrise and artificial light after sunset.

I've worked with enough people now who have emailed me from the 60th latitude where they say, "Yeah, but the sun doesn't rise until, you know, 11:30 AM in the winter. I, how am I supposed to do that?" You know? the name of the game is protect your brain from thinking that the day has fully started until you've actually started your day, right?

You've gotten... You've, you're in work mode. You need to be in that productive mindset. So I'm wearing orange-tone blue blockers, packing my kids' lunches, helping them, get, get

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their stuff situated for school, packing snow bags, all those things. I'm wearing orange-tone blue blockers until I literally get in the car to back out the driveway.

And it, and in fact, I might now actually wear orange-tone blue blockers 'cause my oldest is now driving with his permit, so I get to wear those orange-tone blue blockers until I have to take over the wheel after he gets to school. So, so yeah. I mean, just protect that signal. And then when morning light appears to you, go outside.

Whenever that is. Now, there is a window of time that I've loved as a clinician called UVA rise. My friend Sarah has an app called the My Circadian app. You can download it and put your geographic location and see where UVA rise is. That UVA rise is just when ultraviolet light first appears in your location.

And if you, if you tend towards seasonal depression, if you can get outside, regularly for five to 25 minutes in that window of time throughout the winter, I've seen seasonal depression, including my own, completely disappear. Because that UV light stimulates neurotransmitters, and it allows our brain to make a balanced amount of dopamine and serotonin.

And that serotonin's actually made in the gut and then goes to the brain. That serotonin in the gut actually can facilitate a bowel movement, right? So, so there's a lot of benefits to it. And so then go outside throughout the winter. Get little light checks in all winter long. I still drive with the sunroof open in the middle of winter to get natural light when I'm driving, running errands, picking kids up, taking them here and there.

And then in the evening, again, be protective. So I'm not saying that i- if the sun sets at 4:00 that you have to wear orange-tone blue blockers. But your darkness exposure signals to your brain in the winter where you live should look a lot different than in the summer. So put those orange-tone blue blockers on at least two hours before your desired bedtime, and, and just work from there.

So it really is, you know, similar strategies probably that you've talked about to the summer. But at the same time, we do have to be more protective of the darkness.

Katie: I love this. I hope we get to have so many future conversations on this because I feel like there's so much to learn. And I've made a controversial statement before that I think the light piece is actually much more pivotal than the food piece, and I say that as someone whose background is in nutrition.

But I would be curious on your take on this as well, and how we can change our food intake and our kind of our dietary patterns in the winter to be extra supportive, along with maybe a note on fasting. Like I, I've personally done a lot of fasting in the winter, which seemed

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easier on my body, but I would love for you to kind of explain from a food perspective, how do we support ourselves in the darker months?

Carrie: Sure. Absolutely. And yes, my master's degree is in clinical nutrition. I highly agree with you that I think dialing in the light is more beneficial at first than dialing in the food. Or I should say I've seen people who have got their food dialed in, yet are still expressing symptoms. So what do I think about food?

Well, food in the winter, I, I say think about what you would've been able to source and store prior to scarcity, prior to snow covering the ground, or what you would've been able to hunt even when snow covered the ground. So I'm… So what my body actually starts to crave in the winter is I want root vegetables, the cellar stable produce.

I want soups and stews and warmth. I also have a background through my massage therapy certification in traditional Chinese medicine, and winter is we need that internal warmth, that digestive fire. So it was the coolest thing, probably about six years into practicing circadian and circannual rhythms.

And my body, like, I used to love salads no matter when. I used to love smoothies all year long. And they, those can be healthy. They can have a place. But all of a sudden, in the middle of winter, my body was like, "Don't do a smoothie with tropical fruit and cold. That just doesn't sound good. A salad with raw vegetables?

Like, really? No, have a stew. Have…" And so I encourage people to think about it from a what you could source locally, what you could have as cellar stable, what is warming and nourishing to you in that season. That being said, I think perfectionism is probably the worst thing we could possibly do. So if, if this stresses you out, eat what nourishes you, eat what feels soothing.

But note that we do have the potential to switch to this different type of nourishment in the winter months if that resonates. In terms of fasting, yeah, this pairs beautifully. We would've had strategic scarcity built in likely during these months of the year. So, if you are currently underweight, undernourished, tend towards nervous system dysregulation, I don't encourage fasting.

I cour- I encourage nourishment and abundance signals, and that can be done through food and other, other means. But if you do feel like you've got stable, you know, a stable nervous system, you h- you know, your leptin is within range, which is a signal of metabolic function, or your leptin is high, that's okay, too.

Then I say start with, oh, increasing your f- your, decreasing your fueling window. And I love an early fueling window, right? So, like, basically maybe two meals, maybe, do, maybe

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doing this once a week, twice a week, eating from, oh, 7:00 or 8:00 AM till about six hours later, and allowing your body the extra time for extended autophagy and fasting. Then if that feels good to you, maybe a couple times throughout the winter you'll do a breakfast to breakfast 24-hour fast.

Maybe if you are a more of an advanced faster, you're gonna throw in a three-day to five-day water fast during the winter months. Spring is also a great time to kinda think about fasting as well. So sometimes people reserve those longer fasts to, to kind of be a s- a kind of a kickoff to the spring.

And, you know, there's a, yeah, there's a lot of different types of strategies you can play around with, and I encourage people to build in what I call strategic scarcity, because that is a signal that we were designed to have in the winter.

Katie: Yeah, and I would guess as you're explaining that, people are maybe, like, realizing, like, "Oh yeah, I do...Like, that sounds really good." Like, soups in the winter, and gentle foods in the winter, and maximizing kind of the sleep window in the winter. And I know you have a whole guide around this that covers so much more than we can get to in one episode, and I'm of course gonna link to your website and your social.

You have so many valuable resources. But walk us through the Winter One, and I'll make sure that's linked for people to find.

Carrie: Sure. Sure. This... So this is, like, my fourth annual edition, right? I started to recognize that I wasn't the only one in the world that hated winter, but... And also that there's a better way.

So my goal is to get this guide into the hands as of, of as many people as possible. You don't need to buy the guide to benefit. Start doing the stuff that we did for free that we talked about here. But the guide is It's basically 30 pages with, like, tables that kinda lay this out in a, in a tiered fashion.

How can I change my nourishment to approa- to be supportive? What about the cold strategies? What about... I talk all about infrared. I think infrared and many ways to get infrared is very important in the winter. So I lay out what I call my key winter strategies, and I also have little video lessons linked throughout, which I think are also helpful.

So, you know, the longest video lesson I think is 14 minutes. Maybe three to 14 minutes where you... It's like, okay, yeah, I wanna know more about this topic, but, like, I, I, I... I'm not getting it from just what's being written here. Just go watch the video. And so it really is a guide to help you navigate winter so that it is, you view let...

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You feel like you can be a thriving version of yourself and not just a surviving version of yourself.

Katie: I love that. And like I said, I encourage people to check out your whole website. You have so many protocols, and I feel like you make them so affordable and easy to follow. And I, I know as a person who for years was looking for, like, just what do I do, I, like, have all these things going on, I feel like you cut through the noise so well, and I'm so grateful we got to have this conversation.

For anybody listening, stay tuned. My next episode will be our follow-up conversation, which is gonna dispel some myths about hydration. I'm excited for that one as well. But Carrie, for this one, thank you so much for your time and your wisdom.

Carrie: Thanks for having me, Katie. This was so much fun.

Katie: And thank you for listening, and I hope you will join me again on the next episode of the Wellness Mama podcast.

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