

# SEASONAL EATING PATTERN

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Whether you are ready for it or not, it is the time of the year when the temperature outside is getting colder, days are getting shorter and most people are thinking about soups instead of salads. We know that the amount of daylight hours and availability of food “signal” animals to move south, store food or even hibernate. In humans, there have been numerous studies done on how the change of seasons can change behavior. There has been significant research done on Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD), a well-known condition that impacts as many as 10 million Americans. Symptoms include craving sweets and starchy foods, sleeping more, decreased interest in activities and you guessed it...weight gain. The “triggers” can impact everyone on some level. Let’s cover just a few of the factors that can influence your eating in the months ahead:

**Daylight, or lack thereof.** Increase in darkness during the winter months can increase melatonin production in the body, which leads to increased fatigue and hours of sleep. Some studies have shown that decreased sunlight also can prompt you to not only eat more but also eat faster. As a result, it is estimated that calorie intake can increase 200 or more a day. In terms of activity, those shortened hours of daylight, cold temperatures and ice/snow significantly change your activities and less likely to be outside for long.

The cold burns more calories, but can make you hungrier. Your body burns more calories to maintain your body temperature in cold weather. However, the body also tries to compensate by telling you to eat more. If you aren’t outside much during the winter months then your body doesn’t have to burn more calories, but you still may feel emotionally hungry. People that study what Americans are searching on the internet have found that pork chops, meatballs, chocolate chip cookies, apple streusel and French toast searches spike during the winter.

**Emotional triggers.** The winter months provide their own set of eating challenges that don’t have anything to do with hunger such as:

- You are likely inside more during the winter where food is more available to graze on.
- Fewer “in season” fruits and vegetables may temporarily decrease your interest in eating them.
- All the “eating holidays” – Thanksgiving, Christmas, New Year’s, Super Bowl Sunday, Valentine’s Day and Easter – can add significant calories.



**It may seem that gaining weight in the months ahead is inevitable, but there are several things you can focus on to prevent that.**

- Continue to eat a variety of fruits and vegetables because they are important for your health and immune system; generally are low in calories, fat and sodium; and can help you feel full due to their fiber and water content. The following are in season during the winter and may be more cost effective:

**Fruit:**

bananas | pears | papayas  
citrus fruits (oranges, grapefruit and tangerines)

**Vegetables:**

broccoli | Brussel sprouts | cabbage | cauliflower  
celery | sweet potatoes | turnips | rutabagas

- Stay active! This is so important for so many reasons. Activity burns calories, helps manage stress, supports healthy immune system, etc... And in this area of the world, winter can keep you indoors for almost half the year. Find fun outdoor activities and have you cold weather indoor activities in place.
- Know why you are eating. Physical hunger is defined as your stomach feeling empty, hollow, a burning sensation or hearing it “growl” quietly. If you are physically hungry then nourish your body with a variety of foods. Emotional hunger often is described without any physical symptoms such as “needing something to eat” or you are hungry for a specific food like chocolate or chips, or simply not feeling satisfied no matter what you eat. If this is the case, get out of the kitchen and distract yourself with something. You aren’t hungry, but using food to cope with something else going on.

