Healthy Hibernation

As the sun turns its back on the northern hemisphere, and colder temperatures start to set in, many people would like nothing more than to curl up under the covers and stay there. But the season doesn't have to limit you in such a way! Why not embrace the fall and winter as an opportunity to explore all that the seasons can offer by putting into action some of the following suggestions:

Get crafty. Whether your interests turn to needlework or small engine repair, model building, computer programming or learning the ukulele, there's no time like winter to reacquaint yourself with your hobbies. Indoor activities suited to your interests, abilities and available space will work wonders to help keep you mentally and socially engaged and can ease your seasonal blues.

Keep moving. Yes, some days the weather outside will be frightful, but prying yourself off the couch is essential to physical and emotional well-being, regardless of the season. Get out for a ski, skate, run or walk when you can. Can't bear the great outdoors? Break out your under-used home gym equipment, do some jumping jacks or borrow a yoga video from the library. Not only will you keep your waistline from expanding, but studies also suggest exercise can boost your mood and can be as effective as medication for treating mild to moderate depression.

Take stock. With the long, dark nights that fall and winter bring along, people from many cultures take this as a time of year to slow down their pace of life to reflect. Look inward, consider what's important, and reconcile personal values with time and money spent. Take this chance to re-jig priorities and plans for the year ahead *before* the season of resolutions is upon you.

Crack out a cookbook. What better way to spend winter hours than by re-connecting with your kitchen? Nothing has more power to fuel up your body for the months ahead than home-made seasonal foods. Warm, hearty soups and stews made of root veggies (potatoes, carrots, and onions), fall produce (cabbage, onions, squash) and/or healthy meats, beans and whole grains top the list of soul-warming nutrition to help your body fend off seasonal colds and the flu.

Take some down time. Conserving energy as the nights grow longer and the cold grows stronger is the mammalian way and humans are no exception. Commitments to family, friends, travel and work can keep you tied up for much of the year so take this well-earned opportunity for rest and renewal. Refuel with time alone or with loved ones. Staying up late in front of the TV night after night won't serve your mental or physical health as well as a good night's sleep, so follow the sun's lead and turn in early.

Game on! Instead of riding out long winter nights alone, take this chance to get social and indulge in some competitive fun by hosting a board game night. From classics like checkers, chess and trivia, to newer favourites, board games allow you to reconnect with your inner-child and share some laughs with friends. Even a bout of computer games (in moderation), especially newer ones that require you to get busy simulating sports or funky dance moves, can be fun and even help you break a sweat.

Too much hibernation can lead to weight gain, carbohydrate cravings and the lethargy of the "winter blues", but with a little effort and planning you can maintain your health and wellness across all seasons. By staying active, connected, rested and well-fed, you too can discover a healthier, happier way to hibernate this winter.