

Dr. Marlene's NATURAL HEALTH CONNECTIONS

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THE WINTER ENERGY BLUEPRINT – PART ONE

Winter Happens. Your Body Notices.

Why Winter Alters Energy, Mood, and Metabolism



Every winter, I hear the same questions —

Why am I more tired? Why does my mood feel off? Why does everything seem to take more effort, even when nothing in my life has really changed?

What's interesting is that these questions often come from people who are doing everything they normally do. Their routines haven't changed much. Their stress levels aren't dramatically higher. On paper, nothing looks different — and yet, they feel different.

Often, this realization arrives quietly. It shows up as heavier mornings, slower starts, or a vague sense that the day requires more effort than it used to. It's subtle enough that many people wonder whether it's even "real," or if they're just being unmotivated. This happens to so many of us, including me!

Almost without fail, the next thought is something like, "I should probably just push through this." That instinct makes sense. We're conditioned to believe that dips in energy or motivation mean we're doing something wrong — not sleeping enough, not exercising enough, or, the biggest trap of all, that we're not trying hard enough. But here's the part that rarely gets questioned: why do we assume our body functions the same way in January as it does in July?

Do you see how odd that assumption is?

Winter quietly changes the conditions under which your body is working. Pushing harder without acknowledging those changes usually leads to frustration, not improvement. What feels like a personal shortcoming is often just the body making a seasonal adjustment.



The Blueprint: What's Happening Beneath the Surface

One of the most powerful drivers of winter physiology is light. Light isn't just something you see — it's a biological signal that helps regulate nearly every system in the body. When light enters the eyes, it communicates directly with the brain's master clock, influencing hormone release, alertness, digestion, and energy production.

During the warmer months, early morning light arrives earlier and the light in the warmer months also arrives at a sharper angle (versus a lesser angle in the winter). This light helps cortisol rise at the appropriate time in the morning. Cortisol is often misunderstood as simply a stress hormone, but in healthy balance it plays an essential role in morning energy, mental clarity, and focus. In winter, morning light arrives later and with less intensity. That shift alone can make mornings feel sluggish and energy harder to sustain later in the day.

I've seen this play out in very real ways. My husband lived in Alaska for three years, where winter darkness isn't subtle — it's relentless. The stories he's told are striking, not just because of how dark it was, but because of how people worked with it. Daily rhythms shifted. Light exposure became intentional. Expectations around energy and productivity changed. No one assumed January should feel like July — because the environment clearly wasn't the same. Compare that to how we tend to approach winter elsewhere: shorter days, less light, colder temperatures — and yet the same expectations. Do you see the disconnect?

This is also where Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD) fits into the picture. While SAD is often framed as a mood issue, it's really a physiological response to insufficient light exposure. Reduced light affects serotonin signaling and increases melatonin production, which can lead to low mood, heavier thinking, and earlier sleepiness. These changes don't mean something is “wrong” with you — they mean your nervous system is responding to environmental signals.

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Vitamin D plays a major role here as well. Shorter days and lower sun angles mean that even time spent outdoors often doesn't produce adequate vitamin D during winter months. This matters not only for mood, but for immune resilience. Low vitamin D levels are one of the reasons people tend to get sick more easily in winter — and it's also why supplementation can make such a noticeable difference this time of year. I recommend always checking your vitamin D levels on a blood test, and to take 5,000 IU or 125 mcg of D3 per day. One important note: vitamin D absorbs best when taken with fat, so take it with a meal and not on an empty stomach.

Temperature adds another layer. Cold environments increase the body's need to generate internal heat, even at rest. Warm foods and beverages feel appealing because they reduce the body's workload — and the body is rarely subtle when it needs support. The key is to recognize the signals and not ignore them!

Indoor heating introduces a quieter challenge. Heated air is dry, and thirst cues are less reliable in cooler weather. Mild dehydration often develops without anyone realizing it. Even small fluid deficits can affect circulation, cognitive clarity, and energy levels.

Shorter days and colder temperatures naturally reduce spontaneous activity, even in people who “stay active.” Muscles play an important role in energy regulation, and when movement decreases, that system becomes more sensitive. I've always found it harder to exercise when it's cold, and I have finally learned to grant myself a little break on those days.

None of these signals acts alone. Light, temperature, hydration, movement, and nutrient status interact. When one system becomes strained, others follow. Once you understand that, winter energy stops feeling mysterious — and starts feeling predictable.

Try This Today: Supporting Your Body's Seasonal Shift

A Gentle Reminder About Winter Hydration

One of the simplest and most immediate ways to support winter physiology is to prevent the subtle dehydration this season creates. Foggy thinking, heavy afternoons, and emotional unevenness often trace back to quiet fluid loss rather than lack of sleep or poor nutrition. Try beginning your morning with a warm cup of water, herbal tea, or broth before the day becomes busy. Keep something warm to sip nearby throughout the day — not because you feel thirsty, but because winter suppresses thirst cues. Gentle, consistent hydration supports circulation, neurotransmitter function, and cellular energy production.

What to Know About Winter Vitamin D

The shorter days and reduced light exposure discussed earlier have a direct effect on mood, immune resilience, and metabolic steadiness. Vitamin D plays an important role in supporting systems that winter naturally challenges. Consider reviewing your most recent vitamin D level or scheduling a simple lab check if it's been some time. Many people experience noticeable improvements in clarity, energy, and emotional steadiness when winter vitamin D levels are supported appropriately.

A Simple Winter Boost: Warm, Nourishing Foods

Winter increases the body's workload, even when daily routines remain unchanged. Warm, gently cooked foods help ease digestion and free up energy for circulation, cognitive clarity, and metabolic balance. Throughout the week, try including at least one warm, nutrient-dense meal each day — such as soup, slow-cooked dishes, roasted vegetables, or sautéed greens. These foods help stabilize blood sugar, calm seasonal cortisol shifts, and soften the midafternoon depletion that winter often brings. When cravings lean toward warmth, it's worth listening; the body is communicating clearly.

What's Next?

Part Two of the Winter Energy Blueprint

In Part Two of the Winter Energy Blueprint, we'll explore winter cravings — why they intensify during colder months, what the body is truly asking for through them, and how responding thoughtfully can support steadier energy rather than disrupt it. Cravings are not obstacles; they are information. Learning how to interpret them is a powerful next step.

About Dr. Marlene

Dr. Marlene Merritt's passion for natural medicine is fueled by her drive to help others, and her own experience of overcoming a debilitating heart condition, diagnosed at the age of 20. A competitive cross-country cyclist at the time, she suddenly began experiencing severe chest pains. Forced to quit the sport, she suffered from extreme fatigue and constant pain for another 15 years, despite doing everything that conventional, Western medical doctors told her to do.



And then, the tide turned. A physician trained in naturopathic healing recommended a whole-food vitamin E supplement. A week after starting the supplement regimen, her energy began to return, and the pain began to disappear.

Dr. Marlene is a Doctor of Oriental Medicine, has a Master's in Nutrition, and is an Applied Clinical Nutritionist. She is Board Certified in Bariatric Counseling, and certified in the Bredesen MEND Protocol,™ a groundbreaking method of reversing Alzheimer's disease. She sees patients at the Merritt Wellness Centers in Austin, Texas, and Santa Fe, New Mexico, trains health practitioners nationwide, and is the author of *Smart Blood Sugar* and *The Blood Pressure Solution*.

Vicki wanted to lose weight, but she hated exercise – so how the heck did she **drop 32 pounds** in two months?

If you're having trouble losing 15 pounds or more, just see what happened to Vicki...

Like most of us hitting middle age, Vicki started packing on a few extra pounds each year. Her weight crept up so gradually she hardly noticed. But eventually, Vicki, her husband, and her doctor became concerned. As you might imagine, Vicki's self-esteem took a big hit.

Vicki tried to lose weight by depriving herself of all her favorite foods. She forced herself to eat boring salads and tasteless frozen diet meals. And she exercised like crazy (even though she hated it). But the extra pounds just wouldn't budge.

That's when a friend suggested Vicki try **Smash-It!** This nutrient-infused slimming shake was developed by Primal Labs – a leader in nutritional supplementation.

In the first month alone, Vicki lost 3.5 inches from her belly and 2 inches from her waist, hips, and thighs. And when you hear Vicki tell the story, you'll see why she feels like a different person. "I have so much energy. Oh my gosh, my co-workers noticed within two weeks I was dropping weight," she said. "I was walking around with a big smile on my face."

It's easy to see why Vicki had a big smile. She lost 18 pounds in just 30 days merely by substituting one meal a day with Smash-It! But she wasn't done...

In the second month, Vicki lost an additional 2.5 inches off her belly and waist, and 1.75 inches off her hips. **In only two months, Vicki lost a grand total of 32 pounds!**

What's more, Vicki lost all this weight with only minimal exercise. Which just shows you proper nutrition is 90% of successful weight loss. Because if you're eating the wrong foods, you can't exercise enough to get rid of unwanted fat.

And that's the secret of **Smash-It!**, the delicious meal-in-a-glass that works better than any diet or weight loss program.

Smash-It! has been scientifically formulated to fix the #1 reason most people can't lose weight: **TOXIC FAT CELLS**. Most people get stuck with unwanted pounds, not because of *too much* fat, but rather because of too much of the *WRONG kind* of fat.

This was proven in a landmark study at Temple University. Researchers studied fat cells of overweight people and found them to be toxic, inflamed, and unhealthy. Worse yet, these toxic fat cells "affect blood pressure, blood sugar, triglycerides, and cholesterol," according to *Future Medicine*.

Fortunately, a delicious **Smash-It!** meal replacement shake is an amazing improvement over any meal replacement, protein supplement, or "nutrition shake" you may have tried. In fact, by drinking a daily **Smash-It!** shake, you can:

1. FIX those toxic fat cells for good...
2. FIRE UP your metabolism and supercharge your health...
3. TAKE INCHES AND POUNDS OFF your hips, thighs, and waist, giving you the body you've been dreaming of...

Discover everything you will get with **Smash-It!** on the next page!



Here's What You'll Find in Smash-It!

First, you'll get 21 grams of **quality protein** in a proprietary Quadsourc Blend. This includes whey and pea protein, and even cranberry seed protein to help boost your metabolism and give you the nutrition you need.

Next, a patented *Spectra Blend* contains 29 of nature's most powerful, health-boosting fruit, vegetable, spice, and herbal extracts, including green tea, turmeric, broccoli, bilberry, cinnamon, blueberry, acerola, and many more.

You'd have to eat several servings of fruits and vegetables to get the **antioxidant power** you'll find in *Spectra Blend*. As you know, antioxidants fight the free radical damage that comes with aging. Plus, they increase nitric oxide production to support healthy blood pressure levels and brain function.

In **Smash-It!**, you'll also get:

- ✓ 3 grams of gut-healthy **fiber**, including oat fiber, xanthan gum, and blue agave inulin to help support healthy lipid levels
- ✓ 8 special **enzymes** to help you better digest your food
- ✓ 6 special **probiotics** – “friendly” bacterial strains to support regularity and immune function
- ✓ Biotin and chromium to help maintain healthy blood sugar levels
- ✓ Vitamins A, C, E, B, and D for more health benefits, including support for bone and brain health, as well as healthy blood pressure
- ✓ L-leucine, an amino acid that helps minimize the loss of lean muscle tissue – something to guard against as you age (and when losing weight)
- ✓ And many more vitamins, minerals, and other nutrients to maintain your good health

But what about fat? You know you need fat to feel full and satisfied, so you won't be tempted by unhealthy carbs and sweets. But it has to be *good* fat, not the bad fats typically found in fast and processed foods.



Well, **Smash-It!** contains the absolute **best kind of fat** – medium chain triglycerides found in coconut oil that your body easily burns for energy. And as an added bonus, these fats help support cognitive health.

What's more, the Primal Health team knew that if it didn't taste great, you wouldn't drink it. So, **Smash-It!** comes in rich chocolate, strawberry, and vanilla caramel flavors. It's sweetened with monk fruit that's actually sweeter than sugar. **Smash-It!** contains just one gram of sugar per serving. Compare that to Ensure, with its unhealthy 15 grams of sugar.

With **Smash-It!**, you can **safely and easily melt off up to 15 pounds in just one month**. And enjoy all these benefits in just 30 seconds a day – with minimal exercise and NO impossible-to-maintain diet. What's not to love?

And no worries... Try **Smash-It!** completely risk-free with a no-questions-asked 100% money-back guarantee.

Just like Vicki, now YOU can start shedding those unwanted pounds. Imagine looking and feeling years younger... Fitting into your skinny clothes again... Sounds amazing, doesn't it? Say hello to your new life.

TRY IT TODAY! Smash-It! Nutrient-Infused Slimming Shake
GetSmash-It.com/NHC3

For Faster Service, call 1-888-309-0629
Monday-Friday 7 a.m. to 6 p.m. CST • Saturday-Sunday 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. CST

Q&A

Q: Why do I get sleepy after eating, even if I didn't eat dessert? — Michelle T.

A: Feeling sleepy after a meal is usually a sign that your blood sugar and insulin are doing something dramatic — even if the meal didn't taste “sweet.” Many people assume blood sugar issues only happen with desserts, but the real driver is often the total carbohydrate load, the speed of digestion, and how insulin-sensitive you are. Bread, rice, pasta, potatoes, cereal, even “healthy” smoothies can spike blood sugar quickly, especially if the meal is light on protein and fat. When blood sugar rises too fast, insulin rises to bring it down. And if insulin overshoots, blood sugar can drop too quickly. That drop often shows up as sudden fatigue, brain fog, irritability, or the strong desire to lie down and “reset.” It's not laziness — it's physiology. The goal is steadier fuel delivery. Meals built around protein, healthy fats, and fiber slow absorption and reduce that insulin swing. Many people notice that when they make this change, the post-meal crash disappears within days. And if it doesn't, that's useful information too — because it tells you the system needs more support than just dietary tweaks.



Q: Why does my blood pressure rise when I'm stressed, even if I'm eating well? — James R.

A: Blood pressure is not just a “salt problem.” It's a nervous system problem, a hormone problem, and often a blood sugar problem — all tied together. When you're stressed, your body releases stress hormones like cortisol and adrenaline. These hormones are designed to keep you alive in an emergency, which means they increase alertness, tighten blood vessels, and shift blood flow toward muscles. That automatically raises blood pressure. Here's what people miss: stress isn't just emotional. Poor sleep is stress. Blood sugar spikes are stress. Chronic pain is stress. Inflammation is stress. Even over-exercising can be stress. Your blood pressure doesn't care why your body is under demand — it just responds. This is why someone can eat beautifully and still have stubborn blood pressure if the nervous system stays activated. When you calm the nervous system, blood pressure often improves because the body stops acting like it's under threat. That might mean magnesium, better sleep timing, reducing stimulants, stabilizing blood sugar, or even simply taking a few minutes each day to signal safety to the body. It sounds too simple, but biology is often that blunt. When the “threat” signal goes down, blood pressure often follows.

Q: Why do my joints ache more some days even when I didn't injure anything? — Steven M.

A: Joint pain isn't always a mechanical problem — it's often an inflammatory problem. And inflammation fluctuates. That's why

you can feel fine one day and stiff or achy the next without any obvious injury.

A few common drivers are blood sugar, food reactions, poor sleep, and stress. High glucose increases inflammation and makes tissues more sensitive. Certain foods (especially dairy, gluten, processed oils, and excess sugar) can trigger low-grade immune responses in some people. Poor sleep raises inflammatory signaling and increases pain sensitivity. And stress hormones are inflammatory — chronic stress tightens muscles, disrupts immune balance, and makes recovery harder.

This is why joint pain often improves when you stabilize blood sugar, reduce inflammatory foods and oils, support vitamin D, and calm the nervous system. The joint itself may not have changed — but the inflammatory environment around it has. And that's often the difference between pain that comes and goes versus pain that becomes chronic.

Do you have a question for Dr. Marlene?

Send your health-related questions to drmarlene@naturalhealthconnections.com. Please include your first name and the initial of your last name. Although she cannot answer each question directly, Dr. Marlene will select a few in each newsletter and will address other questions and concerns in articles in future issues. Answers are intended for educational purposes only and should not be viewed as medical advice. If you need help with your subscription or have questions about Primal Health supplements, email support@primalhealthlp.com or call 877-300-7849.