

Dr. Marlene's NATURAL HEALTH CONNECTIONS

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THE WINTER ENERGY BLUEPRINT – PART TWO

Why Winter Makes Cravings Louder

How to Listen Without Losing Control



By the time winter has fully settled in, many people begin noticing a familiar shift. It isn't just that they feel a little more tired or slower than usual — it's that food starts taking up more mental space. Suddenly, decisions that felt easy in September start requiring negotiation.

Cravings don't always show up as constant hunger. They show up as a specific thought that gets louder: something warm in the afternoon. Something starchy at night. Something sweet after dinner. Or the classic: "I'm not even hungry, but I want something. Let me just check the refrigerator again, in case something new showed up."

And what's striking is how predictable it is. It happens year after year — and yet, every winter, people act surprised by it. As if their bodies were supposed to respond to cold, darkness, and low light by craving... celery. Really?

The most common explanation people reach for is self-control. They assume they're slipping, indulging, or eating emotionally. And sure — emotions can play a role. But winter cravings are rarely random, and they're almost never a sign that something is "going wrong." More often, they're the body communicating more clearly because its needs have shifted.

So instead of asking, "What is wrong with me?" it's far more useful to ask:
"What is my body trying to solve right now?"

Because cravings don't appear to sabotage balance. They show up because the body is trying to maintain it.

The Blueprint: What Winter Cravings Are Responding To

Not all cravings mean the same thing — especially in winter. Once seasonal changes begin affecting energy regulation, cravings tend to follow patterns that reflect specific physiological needs. And this is where people get tripped up: they assume cravings are purely psychological, or purely about willpower, when they're often the body's attempt to correct something that has shifted underneath the surface.



When you understand that cravings are information — not a moral failure — you can stop reacting to them as a problem and start reading them as a signal. The goal isn't to “win” against cravings. The goal is to figure out what your body is trying to solve — and support it in a way that actually works.

Carbohydrate or Sweet Cravings

Cravings for carbohydrates or sweets often show up later in the day when energy becomes more sensitive. Shorter daylight hours shift hormone timing, blood sugar becomes less forgiving, and the brain starts looking for quick, reliable fuel.

That's why the craving can feel urgent in the afternoon or evening. It isn't weakness — it's your system trying to stabilize itself fast, and carbohydrates do that temporarily. The best way to reduce this pattern is to build steadier fuel earlier in the day (especially protein and fat), so your brain doesn't have to make a last-minute request for quick energy.

Warm, Dense Food Cravings

Cravings for warm, dense foods usually reflect something slightly different. Cold environments increase the body's workload, even when you're doing nothing. Maintaining warmth requires energy. Warmth itself reduces that demand.

So if you find yourself wanting soup, stew, toast, oatmeal, creamy textures — that's not random. It's often the body looking for efficiency. Warm, dense foods require less digestive effort, help circulation, and support steadier energy. Winter is not the time to be eating salads and cold sandwiches!

Your body isn't asking for comfort food because it wants to derail you. It's asking for warmth because it's trying to conserve energy. Interestingly, if you eat low fat, or not enough fats, you'll tend to be colder. So if you're noticing that, try adding in some fats like nut butter or cheese.

I remember reading this article once, that I wish I could find again. It was about a successful triathlete, who was invited to go seal hunting with the Inuit near the Arctic Circle. He was certain he knew about nutrition, so he packed all these power bars, and carb snacks. When the Inuit saw what he was bringing, they laughed and said, “That stuff will kill you.” He ignored their warnings and brought his own food.

About three days into the trip, he was freezing. They were traveling by boat, on the open water, and even though he was wearing the same clothing as the Inuit were, he was suffering and they were not. No matter what he did, he could not stay warm enough. Finally, desperate, he took the food they offered him — a snowball held together with seal fat. He said it was absolutely disgusting but after the first bite, he started to warm right up.

My mother said the same thing to me in college. I went to school in upstate New York and it was freezing in the winter. I was telling her how cold I was, and she said I should eat more fat. Now, this was the 80's and eating low fat was “in”, and I thought that, as a 19-year-old, I knew something, so I ignored her. But she was right. Now, decades later, I don't make that mistake anymore — I eat more fat in the winter, and I listen to my mother!

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Salty of Crunchy Cravings

Salty cravings are frequently tied to hydration and circulation. Winter air is dry. Indoor heating pulls moisture from the body. Thirst cues often decrease. And many people get mildly dehydrated without realizing it.

But hydration isn't just about water — it's about minerals. When you're even slightly low on fluids, the body becomes more sensitive to changes in blood pressure, circulation, and nervous system stability. That's one reason salty cravings often show up later in the day, when energy dips and people start feeling a little foggy, irritable, or “flat.”

In those cases, the body sometimes tries to solve dehydration by craving salt and crunch — especially late afternoon and evening.

Do you see how funny that is?

Your body might be asking for fluids... and instead you're standing in the pantry eating pretzels. Or popcorn. Or a handful of chips that somehow turns into three handfuls.

Sometimes that's not a “food issue.” It's a hydration and mineral issue.

If salty cravings are a pattern for you, try this first: drink something warm (water, broth, herbal tea) and add minerals before assuming you need more food. Often, the craving quiets down within 10–15 minutes — because what the body wanted wasn't a snack, it was circulation support.

Sudden. Emotionally Charged Cravings

Some cravings feel sudden and emotionally intense — almost like urgency. These are the ones that make people say, “I know I shouldn't, but I can't stop thinking about it.” They don't feel like a preference. They feel like a demand.

This often happens when meals are spaced too far apart, or when earlier meals were too light (especially too low in protein and fat). When blood sugar becomes more sensitive — which winter makes more likely — the brain notices fuel instability quickly. And when the brain senses low fuel, it doesn't politely ask you to eat something reasonable. It triggers stress hormones to keep you functional.

That's why these cravings feel urgent. They're not about weakness or lack of discipline. They're your nervous system stepping in and saying, “We need fuel and we need it now.”

And here's what people don't realize: once adrenaline and cortisol are involved, you don't crave a hard-boiled egg. You crave the fastest, most efficient energy source available — sugar, flour, starch, or something emotionally soothing. That's physiology, not moral failure.

That urgency isn't a personality flaw. It's timing.

And in most cases, the fix isn't complicated. It's steadier nourishment earlier in the day — especially protein and fat — so your nervous system doesn't have to “hit the panic button” late afternoon and evening.

None of these cravings act alone. They're part of the winter adjustment process discussed in Part One. When cravings are understood this way, they stop feeling like disruptions and start making sense as communication.

Try This Today: Responding Without Fighting Your Body

Notice Patterns, Not Intensity

Instead of focusing on how strong a craving feels, pay attention to when it shows up and what it's asking for. Timing, temperature, and emotional tone often reveal more than willpower ever could. A craving at 3:30 PM usually isn't the same as a craving at 9:30 PM. And a craving that feels calm is not the same as one that feels urgent.

Support Energy Earlier

If cravings tend to build late in the day, consider whether earlier meals are providing enough steady nourishment. When energy is supported earlier, the body often stops asking so insistently later on. This requires being honest with yourself about what happened — did you eat too late? Not enough? Too little fat? You might try to justify breakfast by saying you added butter to something, but maybe that just wasn't enough for you on this day. This is one of the simplest shifts people can make: Don't wait for the craving to “prove” you need food. Build steadiness before the craving shows up.

Use Warmth + Hydration Intentionally

When cravings lean toward warmth or salt, gentle support often works better than resistance. Warm foods, soups, broths, and mineral-rich fluids often meet winter needs more effectively than snacking. And if you do snack, do it in a way that actually stabilizes you. A little protein and fat will calm the nervous system far more effectively than a carb-only snack, which usually keeps the cycle going. A scoop of peanut butter goes a long way here. When cravings are met with understanding instead of opposition, they tend to soften. The body responds to support far more readily than it does to control. Be kind to yourself — learning to listen, rather than react with harshness or judgment, gives you room to experiment with what works best.

What's Next?

Part Three of the Winter Energy Blueprint

In Part Three of the Winter Energy Blueprint, we'll connect the dots between cravings, mood shifts, and winter fatigue and the common driver underneath all three: **blood sugar instability**.

Once you recognize the pattern, you'll know exactly how to respond. Stability doesn't come from fighting physiology. It comes from working with it.

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,TM 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*.



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Q&A

Q: I've been told my cholesterol is "borderline." What does that actually mean? — Daniel P.

A: "Borderline" is one of those words that sounds meaningful but is actually vague — and it often creates unnecessary fear. Most people hear it and immediately think, "I'm heading toward a heart attack." But cholesterol is not the villain it's been made out to be, and total cholesterol by itself tells you very little. In fact, cholesterol levels can rise for protective reasons, especially when the body is under stress.

First, cholesterol is essential. You need it for every cell membrane in your body, for hormone production, for vitamin D production, for brain health, and for healing. So the idea that cholesterol is simply "bad" is biologically absurd. The better question is: why is your cholesterol at that level right now? Because cholesterol goes up for reasons, and many of those reasons have nothing to do with eating eggs. Thyroid issues, chronic stress, inflammation, blood sugar instability, and liver function can all raise cholesterol. In other words, cholesterol is often a marker of what's happening in the body — not automatically a danger signal by itself.

So when someone tells you your cholesterol is "borderline," don't panic. Use it as a prompt to look deeper and figure out what is driving the number, rather than trying to force it down without understanding the root cause.

Q: Can poor sleep affect digestion? — Renee T.

A: Yes — and in more ways than people realize. Most people think digestion is just about food, but digestion is actually a nervous system function, and the nervous system is deeply affected by sleep. When you don't sleep well, cortisol and adrenaline rise. Those hormones keep you awake and functional, but they interfere with digestion by reducing stomach acid, lowering digestive enzyme output, and altering gut motility. That's why poor sleep often shows up as reflux, bloating, constipation, diarrhea, or that "my stomach feels off for no reason" feeling — even if your diet hasn't changed. Poor sleep also shifts gut bacteria and increases inflammation, which can make you more reactive to foods you normally tolerate. And it affects blood sugar regulation, which increases cravings and makes appetite more erratic, often leading to late-night snacking or less stable meals — which then makes digestion worse.

The key point is that digestion requires a "rest and digest" state. If you're wired or sleep-deprived, your body simply cannot digest as well. So if digestion has been off, it's worth asking, "How is my sleep quality?" Improving sleep often improves digestion faster than changing your entire diet.



Q: Why do I feel tired even when my thyroid tests come back normal? — Monica R.

A: This is incredibly common — and frustrating. Many people feel exhausted, cold, or foggy, and the doctor says, "Your thyroid is fine." But "normal" often means the test was limited, not that your thyroid function is truly optimal. Most panels only include TSH (and sometimes Free T4). What often gets missed is Free T3, the active thyroid hormone — the one that determines how much metabolic energy you actually feel. Your body has to convert T4 into T3, and that conversion is easily disrupted by stress, inflammation, poor sleep, and blood sugar swings. Cortisol is a major culprit here, and it's one reason people can feel tired even with "normal" numbers. So if your labs are "normal" and you still feel tired, don't stop at TSH. Ask for a full thyroid panel and look at the bigger picture, because fatigue is usually physiology — not a lack of motivation.

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.