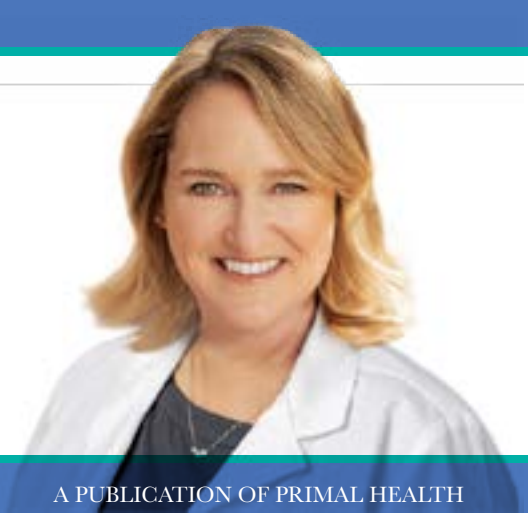
Dr. Marlene's
NATURAL HEALTH CONNECTIONS



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THE WINTER ENERGY BLUEPRINT – PART FOUR

Winter Stress Isn't Just In Your Head

Why Your Nervous System Works Harder in the Cold

By this point in winter, I hear a version of the same comment over and over.

People tell me they don't think they feel especially stressed — but they also don't feel quite right. Everything seems to take more effort. Their bodies feel tighter. Their patience runs out sooner than they expect it to. Their sleep is lighter. Their minds feel busy. And they can't quite pinpoint why.

Now, keep in mind that if life IS stressful — after all, last year was a doozy, never mind what's happening personally for you — then this all makes some sense.

But if nothing obviously seems wrong, then it can be confusing. Life, on a personal level, might actually be fairly calm. Work might be manageable. Relationships might be steady. And that's where people start questioning themselves.

They assume stress has to come from emotional pressure, deadlines, or big life problems. If none of that is present, they start wondering why they feel so… reactive.

Here's what gets missed: winter itself is stressful to the body. Not emotionally stressful — biologically stressful.

Shorter days. Less light. More time indoors. Colder air. Less movement. More demands on metabolism. Even subtle dehydration. These are all signals that your nervous system tracks, whether you're consciously aware of them or not.

And this is why winter stress doesn't usually feel dramatic. It doesn't always show up as panic or overwhelm (thank goodness). It shows up as low-grade tension that never quite goes away. It shows up as sleep that doesn't fully restore you. It shows up as feeling like it's taking more to get through your days.

And because it's subtle, people blame themselves. They think they're losing resilience. They think they should be handling life better. They think they're "just getting older."

I remember a patient of mine, a professor, who could not figure out why she was so tired, and just kept driving herself to finish all the things she had to do. She was sure

she just wasn't managing her time well, or she needed to eat better, or take more supplements… or…. Turns out she had rather shocking anemia, so bad that she needed a transfusion when it was discovered. While I never forgot how she "mind-over-mattered" her way with severe anemia, I also never forgot how quick we are to blame ourselves for what very well could be a physical issue, not mental.

Tthe truth is this: winter changes the conditions under which your nervous system works. And when the system has to work harder behind the scenes, the experience of stress becomes more noticeable — even when life on the outside looks fine.

Can you see why pushing harder doesn't solve it?

The Blueprint: How Winter Alters the Stress Response

The nervous system's job is to keep you safe and functional, constantly gathering information from the environment and adjusting your physiology — mostly in the background. In winter, those signals change, and the nervous system responds accordingly.

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Light Becomes a Weaker Signal

Light is one of the strongest timing signals the nervous system relies on. Morning light tells the brain it's time to be alert and active, and it sets the rhythm for when you should naturally wind down later. That's why being on screens late in the evening can be so damaging — you're essentially telling your brain it's noon when it's actually bedtime.

In winter, that morning light signal is weaker and arrives later. The message about timing becomes less clear. But we don't adjust our modern schedules to match that shift. We still wake up early, push through long days, and expect the same output from a system that, biologically speaking, was designed to slow down, rest more, and basically live in a cave until spring. So even when nothing is "stressful," your nervous system is working harder just to keep you functioning normally.

This is why winter often creates that strange feeling of being tired but not fully settled. People say things like, "I'm exhausted, but my brain won't shut off," or "I'm fine… but I feel tense underneath," or even, "I can't relax the way I normally do." And sometimes it's not even that you feel anxious — it's that your body simply won't let go.

That isn't emotional weakness. It's biology.

Cold Equals A Quiet Demand

Cold is interpreted as a demand — even when it's mild. Cold hands, cold feet, cooler indoor temperatures… these are signals that conditions aren't ideal and resources may need to be conserved.

The nervous system responds by staying slightly more alert, just in case.

That response isn't dramatic, but it's persistent. Over time, that low-level vigilance uses energy. It's like running background programs on your

computer — everything still works, but the system slows down.

People who live in consistently cold environments, especially in the past, learned how to adapt to this. I mentioned several of those techniques in the past few weeks — eating and drinking warm items and avoiding cold food, like salads. Using hot water bottles or microwaveable packs (often made with rice in them) to give you long-term warmth. Making sure you're warm enough at night — cold feet can actually be a cause of insomnia (use that hot water bottle again). All of these tips help reduce the stress on your body that cold causes.

Blood Sugar Instability Triggers Stress Hormones

Winter makes blood sugar more sensitive for many people, and when fuel delivery becomes less steady, the nervous system steps in to protect the brain. At this point in the winter, we've basically spent the last two months eating holiday treats (and now we're eating the leftover ones!) around our normal meals — this is what I mean by "less steady" fuel. Your blood sugar goes up and down, each cookie we eat.

Our bodies try to stabilize this up-and-down by releasing stress hormones like cortisol and adrenaline — not because you're in danger, but because your brain needs fuel and that's how your body accesses that stored fuel in the body. Unfortunately, your fat stores are NOT accessed — what cortisol and adrenaline access is glycogen (and sometimes protein) in the liver and muscles.

This is why winter "stress" often shows up as irritability, restlessness, or feeling on edge — sometimes without any emotional trigger at all. Cortisol and adrenaline don't feel good to us, but that's what's running around in your bloodstream.

And here's what's wild: people often interpret this as anxiety or mood issues, when it's really the nervous system responding to inconsistent fuel availability.

Do you see how important that distinction is?

I've had more patients than I can count, who would come in, regardless of the time of year, wanting help with their anxiety. And across the board, the first thing I would do is stabilize their diet, making sure they weren't skipping meals, reducing the amount of carbs they were eating, and replacing those carbs with more fat, and making sure they ate frequently enough. And a sizeable number of those people noticed within three or four days that they had much less anxiety.

I'm not saying anxiety can't have other reasons for occurring, but people were always amazed that anxiety could have more physical causes, rather than just emotional.

Winter Stress Isn't One Thing — It's Layered

What makes winter challenging is that these signals don't happen one at a time. They overlap.

Less light, more cold, and more sensitive blood sugar create a steady request for the nervous system to stay engaged. When that happens, the system spends more time "on" and less time fully settling.

People often describe feeling tired but wired, calm on the surface but tense underneath, or like they're carrying more stress than makes sense for the life they're living.

That's not you "failing winter."
That's winter demanding more from your physiology.

Try This Today: Calming the Stress Response

Here's the good news: you don't need a massive lifestyle reset to shift your nervous system out of winter stress mode. You need to send it signals of safety, warmth, rhythm, and steadiness — consistently.

Warmth Is a Nervous System Tool

If you feel tense, cold, or slightly "on edge," don't underestimate warmth. Warm socks, warm hands, warm meals, warm drinks, a warm shower, a heating pad on the back of the neck — these are not just comfort strategies. They are regulation strategies. Cold tells the body to stay alert. Warmth tells it, "We're safe." And when the nervous system feels safer, it stops spending so much energy bracing against the day. If you've ever noticed you relax the moment you get warm, that isn't just psychological — it's biology responding to a signal it understands. Sometimes the most effective way to reduce stress is not to think differently — it's to warm the body.

Steady Blood Sugar Quietly Calms Cortisol

Many people focus on calming stress emotionally, but blood sugar steadiness is one of the fastest ways to reduce stress hormones physiologically. If you tend toward irritability, anxious energy, or afternoon crashes, pay attention to whether your meals are actually supporting you. Earlier meals matter more in winter than people want them to. Meals that include enough protein and fat create steadier energy, while carb-heavy meals — even "healthy" ones — often create a rise-and-fall pattern that triggers cortisol. When blood sugar stabilizes, cravings soften, mood steadies, and the nervous system stops needing to "rescue" you with stress hormones. If your stress feels worse in winter, it's worth asking whether it's truly emotional — or whether your fuel supply has been inconsistent.

Stop Trying to "Push Through" Every Signal

This may be the biggest shift of all. Winter is not the season to treat your body like a machine. If you notice resistance — slow mornings, fatigue, lower motivation — the answer isn't always to force productivity. Remember: we were designed to be resting in a cave around a fire at this time of year, not staring at screens, chugging coffee, and trying to function like it's July. That pushback doesn't mean something is wrong with you — it means your system is trying to protect you from running on empty.

Sometimes the most strategic move is to adjust rhythm instead of fighting the signal. Go to bed a little earlier. Reduce evening screen time. Eat warm foods. Build recovery into the day. Winter is already asking more of your system — try not to turn your schedule into an additional stressor. When you stop fighting the season, your body often stops fighting you.

Create One Daily "Downshift" Moment

This is not meditation (unless you want it to be). It's simply one daily moment where your nervous system gets a clear message that it can settle. Ten minutes of quiet after dinner. A short walk at a comfortable pace. Stretching while listening to something calming. Reading instead of scrolling — especially doom-scrolling. Dimming lights earlier in the evening. These small shifts seem almost too simple, but that's exactly why they work. The nervous system responds to repetition, not perfection. Give it a daily signal that says, "You can stand down now," and you'll often notice that everything else becomes easier. Think of it as training your body to come out of alert mode — one small practice at a time.

Series Wrap-Up: Winter Isn't "You." It's Your Biology

If you take nothing else from this series, take this: winter isn't just a season — it's a physiological shift. Light changes, temperature drops, movement decreases, and the nervous system has to work harder to keep you functional. That affects everything: hormone timing, blood sugar stability, cravings, mood, and energy.

Most people assume they should feel the same in January as they do in July. But that's not how biology works. Winter changes the conditions your body is operating under, and the symptoms people complain about — heavier mornings, louder cravings, irritability, fatigue, and that "tired but wired" feeling — are often completely normal responses to seasonal conditions. That doesn't make them pleasant, but it does make them understandable.

And here's what matters most: those symptoms are not random. They are communication. Your body is adapting to less light, more cold stress, and more metabolic demand — and it gives you signals when you're asking it to function as if nothing has changed. What we've done over these four weeks is take those signals and translate them into physiology, so you can stop treating winter like a personal struggle and start treating it like a season that requires a slightly different approach. In other words: this isn't you "failing." It's your body adjusting — and asking you to adjust with it.

The good news is that your body responds quickly to support. Not extreme support. Not discipline. Just the right signals: warmth, hydration, steady nourishment (especially earlier in the day), gentle movement, and nervous system calm. When those inputs are consistent, energy steadies. Cravings soften. Mood becomes more resilient. And winter stops feeling like a constant uphill climb.

Winter doesn't require you to push harder. It requires you to work with the season. When you do, your body stops fighting you — and winter becomes something you can navigate, not something you have to endure. Keep the focus on small, repeatable supports — because the body responds to consistency far more than it responds to perfection.

What's Next?

The Real Culprit of Chronic Disease

Next month we're shifting into a topic that quietly drives most chronic disease — and most people don't realize it until it's already causing problems.

Blood sugar isn't just about diabetes. It drives fatigue, cravings, mood, blood pressure, brain health, and inflammation.

So even if you've never been told you have a blood sugar problem, you might want to stay tuned.

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.

Dr. Marlene Discovers "Insulin Switch" That Stops Blood Sugar Spikes

This blood sugar "switch" is built into every cell of the body and, when it is flipped "ON"…

- **Blood sugar returns to the healthy range**
- **Weight is shed from belly, neck, arms, and thighs**
- **Energy levels return to normal**
- **Sleep becomes easy again**

Dr. Marlene has been helping people repair their blood sugar for the last 15 years.

Just like Arthur Mabee, who was suffering from high blood sugar. His insulin levels were so high, the blood vessels in his eyes began bursting. He was severely overweight and suffering from heart problems. Arthur's doctor wanted to put him on Metformin…

That's when Arthur discovered Dr. Marlene's best-selling book, **Smart Blood Sugar**. "I said, 'Well, I'm going to order this book because this doctor knows exactly what she's talking about,'" Arthur explained.

In just three days of using Dr. Marlene's **Smart Blood Sugar** program, Arthur began to feel changes in his body. He gained more energy, his memory improved, he began sleeping 8 to 12 hours per night—and best of all—he lost 118 pounds since reading the book.

"I've improved my health 190%... I no longer have diabetes. I no longer have a pre-diabetic condition," shared Arthur. "My eyes have even cleared up. This has definitely helped me more than anything I've ever done in my life."

Did you see that? Arthur no longer has diabetes. And so can you! Yes—it is possible to reverse type 2 diabetes and maintain blood sugar in the normal range.

Dr. Marlene's **Smart Blood Sugar** is working for people all across America. And she believes it can work for you, too. Here's how...

This simple plan works by doing a few simple things that bring blood sugar down while stopping a few things that have been pushing blood sugar up. It's a combination of these two actions that make the protocol work so well.

Dr. Marlene's **Smart Blood Sugar** has become a best-selling book because it cuts through all the confusing and contradictory information and zeros in on the exact steps to take right now to heal your blood sugar.

In this easy-to-read, 100-page book, you will find step-by-step guidance, easy tools, and dozens of tips on how to maintain healthy blood sugar levels and repair insulin resistance without wasting a lot of time or money.

"Get this book, sit down, and do the same thing I did. Read it word for word," Arthur shares with others. "**Smart Blood Sugar** will help you greatly."

It's time to bring your blood sugar back in the healthy range. Get your copy of Dr. Marlene's best-selling book, **Smart Blood Sugar**, today for only $47!

Order Your Copy Today!

www.SmartBloodSugar.com/Book

Q&A

Q: **Does coffee affect blood pressure? — Michael S.**

A: It can — but it depends on the person, and it depends on what else is going on in your system. Coffee stimulates the nervous system, and for some people, that increases cortisol and adrenaline. Those hormones raise blood pressure temporarily, especially if you're already under stress, dehydrated, or have blood sugar instability.

If you drink coffee on an empty stomach, you're basically sending your body the message: "Wake up and perform… with no fuel." And yes, your body can do that, but it does it by releasing stress hormones. That's when people feel jittery, get palpitations, or notice their blood pressure is higher than usual.

If you love coffee, you don't necessarily need to give it up. But it helps to drink it after food, not before. Also, hydration matters. Coffee is not a substitute for water, and dehydration makes blood pressure more reactive. So if you're noticing blood pressure spikes, don't just blame salt — look at caffeine timing, hydration, stress, and sleep. It's usually a combination.

Q: **Why do I get headaches when the weather changes? — Olivia K.**

A: Weather-related headaches are extremely common, and they're not "in your head" psychologically — they're in your vascular and nervous system. Changes in barometric pressure can affect blood vessel dilation, sinus pressure, and nervous system sensitivity, especially in people who already lean toward migraines, allergies, or inflammation.

Some people notice headaches when storms roll in. Others notice them when the pressure rises afterward. Either way, your body is reacting to a rapid environmental shift — and if your system is already a little reactive, that shift can feel amplified.

But there's another layer that matters just as much: hydration and minerals. If hydration is low, blood volume drops slightly and circulation becomes more sensitive, which can make pressure changes harder to tolerate. Magnesium is another frequent culprit — it helps regulate blood vessel tone and nerve firing, and deficiency is very common. Blood sugar swings can contribute too, especially if a drop happens quickly after a carb-heavy meal or after going too long without food.

So if you notice "weather headaches," don't chalk it up to bad luck. Use it as a clue. You can't control barometric pressure, but you can reduce how reactive your body is to it with steady hydration, adequate magnesium, and more stable meal timing — and for many people, that combination makes a surprisingly big difference.

Q: **Why do I feel worse when I skip breakfast? — Daniel P.**

A: For a lot of people, skipping breakfast doesn't create "fat burning" — it creates stress physiology. If your blood sugar tends to run sensitive, your brain still needs fuel in the morning. When it doesn't get it, the body compensates by releasing cortisol and adrenaline to keep you functional. That can feel like anxiety, irritability, shaky energy, brain fog, or a sudden crash a few hours later.

Some people can skip breakfast and feel fine. But if you're someone who gets moody, lightheaded, ravenous at lunch, or feels like your energy is unpredictable for the rest of the day, it's often a sign your body does better with an earlier meal — especially one with protein and fat. The goal isn't to eat constantly. It's to give your nervous system the message that fuel is available, so it doesn't have to "rescue" you with stress hormones.

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.