

## Winter is on the Way!

Regardless of the weather where you are, you may find that winter creates some challenges for staying well. For that reason, we offer our annual booklet on *Winter Wellness*.

## Staying Well in Winter

Winter and the holidays can be especially difficult for people with substance use and mental health challenges. Winter depression is more common among people who live in the northern areas of the US. NIMH reports that about 1% of people living in Florida have Seasonal Affective Disorder, compared to 9% of Alaskans and New Englanders. Many people experience milder symptoms of the winter blues. They feel tired and down, sleep more, and crave starchy foods and sleep.

The likely cause of the winter blues and its more serious counterpart is decreased exposure to light.

Healthy food choices and physical activity are key to health and wellness in any season but may be extra challenging in the winter.

Winter cravings can override our good intentions to stick to veggies. Many varieties of fresh fruit increase in price as local production decreases and the produce section of the supermarket is filled with imports. Citrus fruit is a good seasonal option, as are many delicious varieties of winter squash.

Outdoor exercise or physical activity is especially beneficial in the winter. Get outside for a morning walk in the sun, if you can. Movement can boost your mood regardless of where you do it, but the morning sun may help reduce those low-light blues. Bright indoor lights at night, including the lights from your phone and TV, can interfere with your sleep cycle, but morning sun promotes alertness and resets your clock.

## Winter Wellness Resource

Back by popular demand! How do you stay well in the winter? How are you affected by the shorter days and the changes in the weather?

Check out our *Winter Wellness* booklet for more tips and to develop a personalized plan to keep yourself well until the spring flowers return.

Year after year, readers ask us to share the Winter Wellness resource. We created the first Winter Wellness resource over ten years ago, when we offered a workshop focused on creating winter wellness. People loved the booklet we created and, each year since, we have created and released and updated Winter Wellness Planner. You can use this yourself, share with a family member or friend, or plan a workshop or series of group sessions with peers. Please let us know if this resource is helpful or how we can make it even more useful for you or people you support.



## Ending the Year's Wellness Journey on a Grateful Note *by Jacquese Armstrong*

It's that time of year when we pause to celebrate comings and goings. Some call it a joyous season. Some dread the start of it. But, no matter how you feel about, it can be a very stressful time and your wellness can suffer if you don't sharpen up the tools in your arsenal. My mainstay is Gratitude. I call it the gateway to all positive emotions.

You may have heard about the Law of Attraction, which states that your mind's reality shapes your world. Negative thoughts attract negative circumstances and positive thoughts attract positive circumstances. Positive thoughts also create a pleasant space to reside, relatively free from worry, anxiety, and depression.

Gratitude is a positive emotion that has and continues to reshape my world daily. It seems that the Universe smiles especially brightly on those who live in Gratitude. If you don't believe it, take a 28-day challenge. Write down three things you are grateful for, daily, for 28 days, and track the results when the challenge is through.

Being a person with lived experience of more than three decades, peace of mind is like gold to me. And, among other things, Gratitude has delivered peace to my doorstep. It is the most important practice in my spiritual dimension. It delivers a warm, welcoming, positive experience when I reside in it.

About 7 years ago, I was deep in the pit of depression, feeling tormented daily. Fortunately, somehow, I got turned on to Gratitude. I read about the 28-day challenge and started a Gratitude journal, which I have continued to this day.

This so greatly changed my life that I now do gratitude workshops in hopes of helping others feel the same peace of mind I have experienced. I make Gratitude boards to refer to when I'm down. And I take Gratitude breaks when I'm on the edge. It usually brings me to safe ground.

Gratitude—the quality of being thankful; a readiness to show appreciation for and to return kindness—can lead you to many more positive paths, if you let it. The key is appreciation. Appreciation causes you to pause and reflect on the goodness of anything. Living in the state of true appreciation puts a positive spin on anyone's life, making it easier to accept current circumstances and believe that you can achieve more.

Your gratitude can be expressed for anything that has a positive effect on your life, like the green of trees against a very blue sky, someone's smile or laughter, or maybe that dress you couldn't afford and got for 75% off. My Gratitude makes me much stronger for the challenges I have faced. Even with some of the major life changes that have come my way, I believe that every day is a gift because I am grateful.

As this year winds down and another begins, we naturally reflect on where we've been and where we are going. We can use this time to be grateful for what we have and what (and who) we appreciate in our lives today.

We actively seek solutions for the problems in our lives, regardless of their origin or category. However, even as we solve one problem, there will surely be another one. The solutions can't keep or sustain Joy. Living in Gratitude can. So, give yourself the best gift this season; be grateful.

### References and Resources

- Thanks to Jacquese Armstrong for her contribution this month. The photo with the cactus on page 1 was taken in April 2009 at the Desert Botanical Garden, which was hosting an exhibit of Dale Chihuly glass works. It is reprinted here under a creative commons license for non-commercial reuse. You can find the license information, this picture, and more amazing photos from Fritz Liess at <https://www.flickr.com/photos/fritzliess/3547558534/in/photostream/>
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