Inner warmth, a relaxed mind, and strong immunity are signs of balance in winter.

The winter season is ruled by the elements of Air & Ether, which means its qualities are dryness, coldness, subtlety, movement (erratic), and roughness.

Working with the fundamental Ayurvedic principle that like increases like & opposites balance we can create optimal winter health by bringing more warmth, rhythm, moisture, fluidity, and stillness into our daily rhythm in order to avoid imbalance. Imbalance in the winter season can show up as joint stiffness, dry skin, constipation, gas, bloating, insomnia, fearfulness, and anxiety. The primary tools that we use in Ayurveda are lifestyle, food, and herbal therapies, and the emphasis is on prevention of disease and maintenance of good health. This system of health is rooted in daily and seasonal rhythms and so the foods that we eat, and the ways in which we approach activity shift throughout the year.

Winter Wisdom Practices:
- Healthy routines
- Oil massage
- Warming & nourishing foods
- Daily meditation
- Fluid & grounding yoga practices
Dinacharya 101:

Get up with the sun: The early morning is a time of great quiet, subtlety and spaciousness and is ideal for meditation and daily intention setting.

Massage your skin with oil: Daily abhyanga or warm oil massage is a deeply nourishing practice and is especially helpful in winter. Great for those who suffer from anxiety, insomnia or poor circulation.

Move your body daily: Exercising moderately each day is great for strengthening digestive power and keeping energy levels steady. Yoga is warming and gentle while outdoor sports will keep your spirits high.

Eat at regular times: Establish regular times to eat that work for your schedule to maximize digestive capability. Eat your largest meal mid-day, avoid snacking (sip warm water instead!), and ideally don’t eat late at night.

Have quiet evenings: While festive evenings are part of what make the winter season so wonderful aim to spend most evenings of the week in a quiet way so that your body can get it’s annual deep rest cycle. Being in bed by 10pm will help to heal and strengthen your organ systems and immune response.

Nature is rhythmic....

Everything in the natural world moves in rhythm and pulsation so the Dinacharya or daily routine is seen as a process in which we harmonize our daily rhythms with natures larger rhythms which always follow a pattern of expansion and contraction.

Getting up early allows us to renew ourselves in relative stillness and silence before we head out into our days and active engagement with the world around us. This is the ideal time for meditation and a simple movement practice such as yoga. I highly recommend doing a ten minute movement practice each morning as a way of waking the body up without overstimulating the mind. Commit to this for a week and you will be amazed at how much benefit that ten minutes can offer you. This is also the time to do your daily oil massage, which I’ll talk more about on the following page.

Meals are ideally eaten at regular times with space between for your body to work on digestion. Shift your largest meal of the day to lunchtime for best effect, especially if you struggle with your weight or have digestive complaints. Sipping warm water between meals will help you avoid snacking (which weakens digestion) and will ward off dehydration, which is common this time of year. Get in the habit of keeping a thermos of warm water with you at all times to make this easier to do.

Making evenings a quiet time in which you re-connect with yourself, your friends, or your family members is especially nourishing this time of year and will warm you from the inside out. Getting to bed by 10pm as often as possible will strengthen your entire system as this is a vital time for your body to repair and renew itself. As well getting to bed early will make it easier to get up early so that you can optimize your daily rhythms!

Do your best!
The Dinacharya is the ideal daily rhythm and so we use it as something to work towards on most days of the week. You will need to work with it to create the optimal schedule based on your responsibilities and daily routines. Just do your best and you will feel the benefit quickly!
Abhyanga 101:

Choose good oils
Choose cold pressed oils that are food grade or higher. Sesame oil is warming and is recommended for winter, however if you find the smell too strong try almond or jojoba. Coconut is lovely in the summer but is too cooling for winter.

Customize your scent
Adding essential oils is a lovely way to add another level of sensual pleasure to your daily massage. Good choices for winter time are Jasmine, Rose, Clove, Chamomile, Rosewood, Ginger, Frankincense, Vetiver, Sandalwood, Ylang-Ylang, and Mandarin.

Use old towels
Over time your towels will get saturated with oil so I recommend using older towels and washing them with baking soda. Once they get too old be sure to replace them as they can become a fire hazard in the dryer!

Oil in your nose?
Putting a drop or two of warmed sesame oil in your nose and ears each day will help you ward off colds and ear infections. It is also deeply soothing to the nervous system. Try it when you travel to avoid getting sick! I will massage my whole scalp with oil on the days I wash my hair as well and this not only nourishes the hair and scalp but it feels amazing!

Ayurvedic Oils
If you would rather not make your own massage oils here are some links to some companies that make beautiful blends.


Oil is nourishing.....

According to Ayurveda winter is Vata season which means that we are more prone to dry skin, nervous exhaustion, and insomnia. A daily warm oil massage can help with all of this and is my favorite self care routine. It feels like wrapping myself in a warm blanket for the day and makes my morning meditation easier to settle into or helps me to sleep after a full day. Try it for a week and see for yourself how amazing it feels.

1. Buy cold pressed oil. You may also choose to add essential oils to your oil.

2. For best results warm the oil in a hot water bath by immersing the bottle in a larger measuring cup of hot water from the tap.

3. Dry brush your entire body first with a dry brush or exfoliating gloves if you have time. You can do this while the oil is heating in the warm water bath. This is especially nice in the morning as it gets your circulation going.

4. Massage your whole body from head to toe always moving towards the heart and covering your limbs in broad strokes. Make circles around your joints such as knees and elbows. Include your face for a sweet facial massage. On the days I wash my hair I also massage my entire scalp.

5. Get in the shower or tub and keep massaging the oil into your body. Try to only use soap where necessary as it really dries your skin out.

6. Pat your skin dry with a towel.

7. This entire routine takes about 15 minutes with a morning shower. Alternatively you may choose to do it before bed and combine with a bath as a great way to end the day and sleep well.
There are 6 Rasas or Tastes in Ayurveda and they are Sweet, Salty, Sour, Bitter, Pungent & Astringent. Ideally we have all six in each meal but during each season three of the primary tastes will be highlighted while the others will be minimized. In this way we move through all the tastes as we move through the year.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Winter Rasas</th>
<th>Sweet</th>
<th>Sour</th>
<th>Salty</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Elements</td>
<td>Earth + Water</td>
<td>Fire + Earth</td>
<td>Water + Fire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary Actions</td>
<td>Building, calming &amp; nourishing</td>
<td>Increases digestive fire &amp; mineral absorption</td>
<td>Moistens tissues, stimulates digestion, improves taste</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foods</td>
<td>Grains, Meats, Root Vegetables, Sweet Fruits, Milk, Butter/Ghee</td>
<td>Lemons, Limes, Fermented foods (kombucha, sauerkraut, miso)</td>
<td>Seaweeds, unrefined sea or earth salts, celery</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Rasa is a Sanskrit word that means taste, flavor or essence.

The rasas of Sweet, Sour, & Salty are made up of the elements of Fire, Water, and Earth and so are the ideal choices for the Winter diet. They promote satisfaction, warmth, and moisture to all the tissue layers that make up the body and so nourish us deeply. The sweet flavor will make up most of our diet as it is primarily building foods such as grains, meats, dairy and root vegetables. The sour flavor will be taken in smaller amounts but will provide support for digestion and will help us to absorb minerals and other nutrients from our food. The salty flavor is grounding and lubricating if taken in small amounts. Excess salt, or poor quality salt however can cause fluid retention, or dryness so it is best to treat yourself to really good quality salt and add sea vegetables to winter stews or cooked beans.

**Use winter spices to increase digestion of heavier winter foods.**

As the winter diet is a heavier diet it is a good idea to add warming spices to meals and drinks to increase digestion. Good choices for this time of year are Cinnamon, Ginger, Clove, Nutmeg, Cardamom, Black Pepper, and Parsley.

**Get a crockpot!**

Soups and stews are ideal in winter as they allow you to get alot of nourishment in a way that is easy to digest and the high liquid content is important at this time of year. I use a crockpot in the morning for fresh soup each evening which is convenient and satisfying.
Meditation 101:

Commitment: The first step in cultivating a meditation practice is making a commitment to meditate for a set period of time each day. It can be surprisingly challenging to simply sit still and stop doing for a few minutes each day but if we don’t do it we can easily become depleted and overwhelmed through constant activity.

Timing:
Sit for a reasonable amount of time each day. 15-30 minutes is ideal. If you are new start with 15 and work towards 30 in time. Ideal times of day to meditate are first thing in the morning, before you head out into the world, or in the early evening.

Technique
There are many ways to approach meditation and they all work, the key thing is to pick one or two techniques that work for you and to stick with them for best results.

Posture:
Meditation is ideally done sitting up rather than reclining (unless you are practicing Yoga Nidra). This is so that you can find a balance between alert awareness and relaxation. If sitting cross legged on the ground doesn’t work for you sit with your back leaning against a wall and your legs stretched out straight, or use a chair. If you are using a chair just make sure you are sitting upright at the edge of the chair with your feet on the floor and your spine long.

Meditation On Spaciousness
Sit in a comfortable, upright posture, close your eyes, and gently merge your attention with the flow of breath coming in and going out through your nostrils. Keep returning attention to the breath each time it wanders away. Do this until you feel the breath gently slow down and the thoughts become quieter.

Imagine that your body is completely empty. It is as though your skin were a thin membrane, like the skin of a balloon, and inside it is nothing but space. Not only is your body full of space, but space also surrounds you on every side. As you inhale, have the feeling that you are breathing space in through the pores of your body. Exhale with the same feeling. Your skin is a delicate, porous membrane, and you are breathing through it. you are in an ocean of space, With each breath, gently let go into the ocean.

Mantra Meditation
Sit in a comfortable, upright posture, and focus on the flow of the breath. Gently, and with relaxed attention, begin to mentally repeat the mantra Om Namah Shivaye (“I bow to the auspicious light within”). You may coordinate it with the breathing or simply repeat it slowly, again and again, listening to the syllables as you repeat them. Allow your attention to focus more and more fully on the mantra’s syllables. Feel that each syllable is softly dropping into your awareness. Let yourself feel the space that the mantra creates inside. Allow the energetic space created by the mantra to expand. Feel that you are inside the mantra’s energy and that the mantra is pouring through your body until it fills you and surrounds you on every side. Let the mantra move though you like a river of liquid sound, and allow yourself to dissolve into that sound.

These practices are from Sally Kempton’s wonderful book Meditation For The Love Of It.
http://www.sallykempton.com/products/
Focus your mind like a flame.

Keep your breath and movements fluid.

Keep the foundation of your body rooted in each pose.