



Asters and mums, ah, autumn is finally really here! As the days get shorter and nights cool, I am mindful that winter will soon be here. Even though I embrace winter and all the activities it brings, I find the shorter days and seemingly endless darkness a bit difficult at times. I know from speaking with many of my patients that winter is not the favorite season! As our gardens die back and colored leaves fall leaving bare, gray branches, the earth seems to be preparing for its own hibernation. By November, the world will have taken on a monochromatic display of shades of grey, broken up only by the evergreens' verdant hues and the brilliance of late autumn sunsets. As the earth turns inward and its animals prepare for hibernation, so, too, it is time for us to also turn inward.

Embracing the Darkness, Creating the Light

Let's face it: the majority of our lives are spent doing things. We work, we clean. We cook, we drive children. We pitch in, we throw out. We support, we facilitate. And in between, we sleep, eat, and watch television. Isn't this the way it is in 21st century America?

We have been trained to believe that the more things you can do at one time, the better. The

term "multi-tasker" was something to aspire to become. I, myself, was a great multi-tasker. I could do it all, on my way to the next thing on my list! But what I have learned is that this is the *wrong way to be!*

Turn again to the changing seasons, the shortening days. Many folks have a hard time with the long nights, the cold temperatures. Seasonal affective disorder occurs when there is a lack of sufficient sunlight—and joy—in our lives. I think that a lack of vitamin D also plays a role, as our levels of this nutrient inevitably plummet during fall and winter. Yet another thing I have encountered is this: the long nights force us to be with ourselves more. Okay, you can turn on the TV and drown yourself in sitcoms and news. But spending more time indoors, under artificial lighting, can leave us anxious, restless, as if something is missing. It can also lead to what I call "boredom eating" and other mindless activities such as too much television, email and Facebook.

What I find in myself is that often I am uncomfortable with just being alone and still. It is something we never learn to do. It is something we need to teach our kids. We are always off doing things that need doing, and we are chastised for being idle—for simply "being". I'd like to invite you to explore your inner self this fall and winter, taking cues from nature. As the season commences and the darkness ensues, I'd like you to think about creating your own light.

- **Be still and observe.** This sounds so simple, but it is so hard to watch something and to not have any input. It is hard to just "be" especially when others are busy "doing". If you have children, watch them interact. If you have pets, sit back and notice their

mannerisms, their hierarchy and how it plays out. If you can be outside, watch birds at a feeder or in the trees. When it rains, sit by the window and watch how the rain plays off the windows, the railings, the leaves. Resist the desire to have an affect on any of it, just observe quietly. Notice everything you can about that which you are watching. This simple exercise is the easiest way to transcend from doing to being that I know. It is meditative for those of us who are too "noisy" to meditate. It offers a much needed break in the midst of our non-stop days.

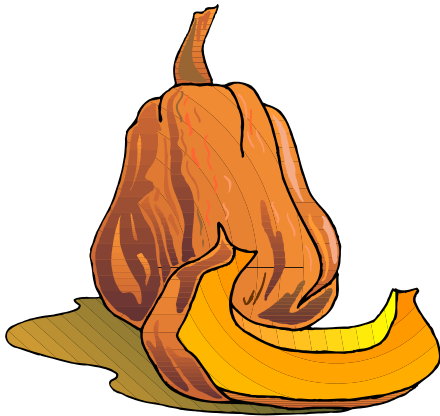


- **Cultivate creativity.** Perhaps we aren't much like Martha Stewart, but we all have an untapped creative side waiting to come forth. Consider it your inner child if you like. If you have children, this is easy. Color with their crayons and colored pencils. I bought a coloring book of Mandallas and, with the colored pencils that my dear friend gave me, make time to color when the need arises. Go to a bead shop or craft store and look for ideas. Gather gourds and mini pumpkins and little candles and make a table arrangement. Fingerpaint with your children. Ask yourself what you would create if you could allow

yourself to try---and do it. I used to love to do needlework as a child. Haven't done it in decades. But I have been thinking about picking up a little project after my semester is finished, something I could do in a couple weeks. Perhaps you could explore some new music. I like Pandora.com, because you can create your own personal station and listen to new artists that fit your style. There's nothing like sitting quietly with a cup of tea and just listening to new music. The point of all this is to stretch yourself into another dimension, if only for a little while, and to exercise your right brain. And to be in the moment, totally, and with all of yourself.

- **Invite ritual.** After a long day at work or a hard day of housekeeping or shopping, it is all too easy to plop down in a chair and zone out with TV or a newspaper. After all, it is the end of the day, and it is dark outside! When folks tell me they have "no time" for anything else in their schedules---this is the time I insist that they find time for ritual! Evening time is often the time where we can find that ½ hour to spare. Rituals are wonderful for preparing for sleep, for switching from "do" mode to "be" mode. It is a great time to celebrate the day's end, to bond with children, to connect with a spouse. And, it's a great way to add meaningful time to the dark evenings of fall and winter. Here are some suggestions: My favorite ritual is my tea ritual. When the evenings get cool, my husband and I settle in with a cup of herbal tea before bedtime. The warmth of the cup, the

aromas of mint and chamomile, the sedating, relaxing effects of sipping slowly—all help us to unwind and prepare for good sleep. Do you have small children? Make bath time a meaningful ritual by setting out fluffy towels, putting a few drops of lavender essential oils in the water, and taking turns telling stories in the tub. You pick the story theme, and then all of you create a story and invite your imaginations to run wild. Both you and your children will benefit from exercising your imaginations and creativity, and it is a wonderful way to deepen the family bonds. Other evening rituals might include setting aside time to read (not junk mail!) a book you've always wanted to explore, reading the Bible, writing in a journal. Whatever it is, make it a sacred time, a scheduled time just for unwinding and "being".



Autumn Eats

The last of the tomatoes are but a memory, but welcome winter squash and fall greens! This is the time to explore all the shapes, colors and sizes of winter squash. Simply halve, scoop out the seeds and rub with oil. Roast, cut side down in a shallow pan or

baking sheet at around 375-400 degrees until soft. It depends on the size, but 30-40 minutes for a good-sized butternut. Then, allow to cool, scrape out the soft flesh and season. You can also use cooked squash to blend into pancakes, soups, stews, or mash and bake into a pieshell just as you would a pumpkin. The colors of squash remind you that you are getting a plethora of carotenoids—the plant nutrients that protect our bodies from aging, cancers and sun damage, to name a few items.

By the way, you can save those squash and pumpkin seeds! They are a bit of a bother to wash off, but if you use it as a mindfulness exercise—be in the moment!!—then you can easily wash off the membranes, separate the seeds and then lay them out to air dry on some waxed paper. You can also slowly roast them in an oven until dry and crunchy. Lightly sprinkle with sea salt or other seasonings while they are drying. Squash seeds are high in zinc, fiber and protein and make a wonderful snack or topping for cooked cereals or salads.



Don't forget to add more nuts and seeds to your diet as the weather cools down, along with your fish oils. Walnuts, Brazil nuts, sunflower, flax and pumpkin seeds all provide essential fats that will keep us well-lubricated inside and out. We need the

healthy Omega 3 fats to calm inflammation and provide flexibility to our cell membranes so they can communicate properly. A handful of nuts is a perfect between-meal snack, just make sure they are plain, raw nuts, not salted and roasted in oil.



Also, speaking of oil, I want to remind you of the many uses and wonders of coconut oil. If you have dry skin, there is nothing like coconut oil! Instead of washing your face in the morning, scoop out a bit of coconut oil and liquefy it by rubbing it between your hands. Rub it onto your face, avoiding your eyelids (otherwise it will blur your vision!). Go about your early morning activities. When you are ready to put your makeup on, simply rinse off with cool water and pat dry. Your skin will real great! I do this every morning, and my dogs hover around me, waiting for their coconut oil in their breakfasts. Try some added to your breakfasts, too—it is great in oatmeal and on toast. Use it in place of butter. Coconut oil is a terrific medium-chain fatty acid which aids in weight loss, energy production and reduces inflammation in the body. Yes, it is a saturated fat, but it is a good fat!! Check out Bruce Fife and the [coconut research center](#)! When buying coconut oil, buy unrefined, organic oil such

as from Nutiva. You can order it very inexpensively from www.iherb.com or www.vitacost.com, both very reputable companies.

I hope I have given you reason to embrace yet another season change! They do seem to come upon us rather quickly these days. So power up your flashlights and head out for an early morning or late day walk. Get out and rake some leaves—and then jump in the pile! Whatever you do, take time to be fully present in the moments, because as Jon Kabat-Zinn says in the title of his great book, “Wherever you go There you Are”. Think about it. It’s true. Embrace it.

Have a beautiful fall, and Happy Thanksgiving!

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