

Brave rainy doldrums with healthy habits



By Melissa Carr, Special to 24 hours
Thursday, November 7, 2013 2:52:04 PST PM



Rain spatters a dashboard in Raincover, er, Vancouver, B.C. (REUTERS FILE PHOTO)

Vancouver and the Lower Mainland have two distinct seasons — wet and dry. Though the cold and wet weather seems to entice us to cocoon indoors, become less physically active, and crave rich and heavy comfort foods, it is possible to adjust to the season with healthy habits.

Though some don't mind the rain, many feel more like a cat than a duck, spending more time curling up on the couch than wading through puddles. Getting outdoors for fresh air and time closer to nature has been shown to help better manage moderate to severe depression, increase positive outlook and emotional stability, improve energy, and boost the immune system. Dress appropriately so that the elements don't dampen your spirits or your feet. If even the trendiest raingear or fanciest umbrellas don't entice you to get outdoors, Vancouverites are lucky to discover that some rainy days at sea level are bright days on the mountains.

Another way to simulate the sun is to use a seasonal affective disorder light. This special light box is used for about 30 minutes in the morning to suppress the body's ongoing release of melatonin, improving mood disorders related to a loss in daylight exposure.

If it is not possible to get out to the woods, bring some green indoors with potted plants. Peace lilies, snake plants, rubber plants, and spider plants help clean and filter the air, absorbing airborne mould spores, bacteria, and cancer-causing contaminants like formaldehyde. Some plants offer both culinary and medicinal benefits. Rosemary can help keep the brain sharp, improving mental focus and memory. Thyme and oregano boost the immune system and help ward off winter colds and flu.

Rich, sugary, and heavy foods may be what we crave as the weather cools down, but that combined with less activity can lead to weight gain, fatigue and other health issues. Comfort foods needn't be unhealthy. Sweet potatoes, yams, stews, slow-cooked meals, curries, and more can fulfill our wishes for sweet, warming or filling foods.

Traditional Chinese medicine principles remind us to support our immune system by keeping our necks warm with scarves or collars, considering foods and herbs like garlic, reishi mushroom, and astragalus, and seeking a tune-up with acupuncture.

Dr. Melissa Carr is a registered doctor of traditional Chinese medicine, caring for patients in an integrative medicine clinic in Vancouver.

Reader's comments »

If you already have an account on this newspaper, you can login to the newspaper to add your comments.

By adding a comment on the site, you accept our terms and conditions and our netiquette rules.