

DECEMBER 2024

PLAN FOR HEALTH NEWSLETTER

THIS MONTH'S TOPICS:

- **Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD)**
- **Gratitude**
- **December Recipe: Chicken 'n Dumplings**

Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD)

Seasonal affective disorder (SAD) is a type of depression that's related to the change in seasons. Most people with SAD experience symptoms that start in late fall or early winter and go away during the spring and summer months. However, while less often, other people may experience depressive symptoms during the spring and summer months. Sometimes these mood changes are more serious and can affect how a person feels, thinks, and behaves. If you notice significant changes in your behavior or mood when the seasons change, you may be experiencing SAD.

SAD Symptoms

- Persistent anxious, sad, or "empty" mood most of the day, nearly every day, for at least 2 weeks.
- Feelings of irritability, frustration, or restlessness.
- Feelings of pessimism, guilt, hopelessness, helplessness, or worthlessness.
- Loss of interest or pleasure in hobbies and activities or social withdrawal.
- Decreased energy and fatigue.
- Difficulty concentrating or making decisions.
- Changes in sleep and/or appetite.
- Physical aches or pains, headaches, or digestive issues that do not have a clear physical cause.
- Thoughts of death or suicide or suicide attempts.

Managing SAD

Treatment for SAD falls into four main categories that can be used alone or in combination with one another:

- **Light therapy:** Sitting in front of a very bright light box first thing in the morning for about 30-40 minutes a day from fall to spring.
- **Psychotherapy:** Psychotherapy, also called talk therapy or counseling, teaches new ways of thinking and behaving and changing habits that contribute to depression.
- **Antidepressant medication:** Medications used to treat depression (antidepressants) can be effective for SAD when used alone or in combination with talk therapy.
- **Vitamin D:** Because many people with winter-pattern SAD have vitamin D deficiency, vitamin D supplements may help improve symptoms. Talk with a health care provider about any dietary supplements and prescriptions or over the counter medications you are taking, as vitamin D can interact with certain medications.

SAD is diagnosed more in women than men, and in younger adults than older adults. People who are more at risk of SAD are those who have a family history of SAD or another form of depression or bipolar disorder, living far from the equator, and having low levels of vitamin D. Talk to your healthcare provider if you are feeling down for days at a time and are unmotivated to do activities you normally enjoy.



What is Gratitude?

Gratitude can be broadly defined as a thankful appreciation for what an individual receives, whether tangible or intangible. With gratitude, people acknowledge the goodness in their lives by showing appreciation for the things that are meaningful or valuable to them.

One of the best aspects of the holiday season is the chance to reflect on all that we're grateful for in our lives. For many of us, it's one of the few times that we intentionally acknowledge all of the people, things and circumstances that we're most appreciative of. This practice however doesn't just need to be limited to the holiday season and a growing body of research suggests that implementing a regular gratitude practice can have numerous benefits on your physical, mental, emotional and social well-being.

Benefits of Gratitude

The effects of practicing gratitude are far-reaching and positively impact every aspect of one's health. Practicing gratitude can help:

- Reduce depression and anxiety
- Support heart health
- Relieve stress and improve sleep
- Strengthen relationships
- Improve focus
- Increase levels of self-esteem and overall life-satisfaction



How to Practice Gratitude

There are many different exercises that have been shown to help people cultivate a stronger sense of gratitude in their day-to-day life by incorporating the following:

- **Keep a gratitude journal:** Spend a few minutes each day writing about something you are grateful for.
- **Write a thank-you note:** This can be a letter or email expressing your enjoyment and appreciation of that person's impact on your life. This can also help nurture your relationship with that person.
- **Thank someone mentally:** Practice positive state of mind and think about someone who has done something nice for you, and mentally thank the individual.
- **Revisit and reframe experiences:** Experiences we view as negative have also likely contributed to our personal growth in some way. Finding lessons in difficult experiences can help cultivate more gratitude.
- **Savor the moment:** If you find yourself naturally feeling grateful at any moment in your day, rather than simply letting the feeling pass, take the time to tune-in and notice exactly what it is you're grateful for and why it brings you joy.

Whether you hope to boost your mood and mental health, protect your physical health, or improve your personal relationships, research is continuing to show that gratitude offers significant benefits. Cultivating gratitude can open the door to a different perspective—one that values the goodness in our lives. With practice, we can use gratitude to improve our life experience and navigate adversity with greater resilience.

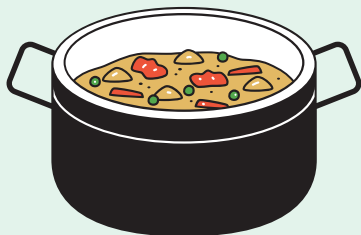
December Recipe: Chicken 'n Dumplings

Prep Time: 30 minutes

Servings: 6

Ingredients:

- 1 whole chicken
- 1 pinch salt
- 1 lemon, halved
- 2 stalks celery, sliced
- 1 small onion, chopped
- 2 carrots, sliced, or more to taste
- 2 cups all-purpose flour
- Salt and ground black pepper to taste



Directions:

1. Place chicken and 1 pinch salt in a large pot; cover with water. Bring to a boil, skimming any scum off the surface with a slotted spoon. Add lemon, celery, onion, and carrots. Simmer broth over medium heat until chicken starts to fall off the bone, about 1 hour.
2. Discard lemon. Remove chicken from the pot; let cool.
3. Place flour, salt, and pepper in a large bowl. Make a well in the center. Ladle in 2 to 3 scoops of hot broth. Mix in flour with a spoon until dough comes together into a ball.
4. Turn dough out onto a floured surface. Knead carefully until smooth. Roll out into a large rectangle; cut into small rectangular dumplings.
5. Drop dumplings one at a time into the simmering broth. Cook, stirring occasionally, until tender, about 30 minutes.
6. Bone chicken and chop into pieces. Add to the pot; cook until heated through, about 5 minutes.



Stay tuned for January's topics:
Winter Safety, Sustainability and Goal Setting

