TRUTATVA™

A SEASONAL GUIDE · HEMANTA AND SHISHIRA

The Ayurvedic Winter Care Guide

Food, oil, sleep and small daily habits for the cold months, written the way we would explain them at home.



A note from us

Every winter, someone at home starts complaining about dry skin, a flaky scalp or a stiff morning. Every winter, someone else says "just apply some oil."

That advice is old, and a lot of it has a reason behind it. Ayurveda describes winter as a season with its own rules for food, for oil and for sleep. We have spent years reading those texts and making our oils and serums in small batches, so we wanted to put the useful parts in one place.

We have tried to be plain about what we know. Where a classical text says something, we tell you which text. Where modern research backs a habit, we say so. Where we could not find good evidence, we say that too. Tradition and comfort are good reasons to do something, as long as we do not dress them up as proof.

Read it once, pick two or three habits, and see how your winter feels. You do not need to do everything. Nobody does.

Nipa Katkoria
FOUNDER, TRUTATVA



Please read this too. This guide is general information, not medical advice. If you have a health condition, take regular medicines or are pregnant, talk to your vaidya or physician before changing food, oils or supplements. Nothing here replaces their advice.

INSIDE

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Pages 10 to 13 are recipes. Page 17 is made to be printed and stuck on the fridge.

01

Winter and your body

Ayurveda does not treat winter as one long season. It splits the cold months in two.

HEMANTA

Early winter. Roughly mid-November to mid-January, though the dates shift with region and with the text you read. The air is cold and crisp.

SHISHIRA

Late winter. Colder and drier still, running toward the start of spring. The texts say the dryness of the air matters more here.

Why the texts say to eat more now

The classical idea is that in the cold, the body holds its heat in, so digestive fire (*agni*) is strong. The **Charaka Samhita** says that in Hemanta, healthy people can digest large and heavy meals. The **Ashtanga Hridaya** adds a warning: a strong fire with too little fuel starts to burn the body itself. So winter is the season to eat properly, not to skip meals.

> **In plain words.** The Ashtanga Hridaya (Sutrasthana 3, on the seasons) says that in cold weather the digestive fire becomes strong and is driven by vata. If it is not given enough food, it consumes the body's tissues. So it advises sweet, sour and salty tastes.

The second idea: dryness

Cold, dry wind increases *vata*, the dry, light, moving quality. This is why oil, ghee, warm food and warm clothing run through every winter instruction in the texts. Dry, cold and rough qualities are answered with oily, warm and soft ones.

Sources: Charaka Samhita, Sutrasthana 6; Ashtanga Hridaya, Sutrasthana 3. Verse numbers differ between editions, so we cite the chapter. The idea that winter is the season of greatest strength comes from the classical texts and later clinical observation. We did not find a trial that tests it.



What you may notice

Winter does not hit everyone the same way. These are common patterns, not a diagnosis.

When it feels dry and cold

- Rough or cracked skin, dry lips
- Flaky scalp
- Stiff mornings that ease as you move
- Light, broken sleep
- Constipation or gas

Ayurveda reads these as a rise in **vata**. Warm, oily, grounding food and routine are the traditional answer.

When it feels heavy and damp

- Sluggish mornings, wanting more sleep
- A heavy feeling after meals
- Blocked nose, coating on the tongue
- Slow digestion
- Putting on weight through the cold months

Ayurveda reads these as a rise in **kapha**. Lighter portions, warm spices and regular movement are the traditional answer.

Most people are a mix. It is common to have dry skin and a heavy stomach in the same week. That is fine. Use the guide as a menu, not a rulebook.

A word of care. Dry skin, stiffness and poor sleep can also be signs of other things. If something is new, severe or not improving, see page 18.



03

Your winter day

A gentle timetable from the classical advice. Take what suits your day.

MORNING

- A glass of warm water to start. This is a tradition, and we found no strong research for it, but many people like it.
- Warm sesame oil on arms, legs and soles before your bath (page 7). Ten minutes is enough.
- A bath with warm, not scalding, water.
- A few minutes of morning sun. Sun bathing is on the classical early-winter list.
- A proper breakfast: warm porridge or upma with a little ghee. The texts list under-eating as something to avoid in winter.

DAYTIME

- Make lunch the main meal. Rice or roti, dal, vegetables and a spoon of ghee.
- Keep moving. The texts name regular exercise, in measure, as part of the winter routine.
- Cover your head and ears in cold wind, and dress in layers.

EVENING AND NIGHT

- Ginger tea or warm water with jeera. A small snack such as one til laddu or a few soaked nuts.
- Dinner early, warm and lighter than lunch. Skip cold drinks and ice cream.
- A slow ten-minute walk, then dim the lights and put the screens away (page 16).

Sources: Trutatva winter routine notes based on the Ashtanga Hridaya, Sutrasthana 3 and the Charaka Samhita, Sutrasthana 6. Lukewarm bathing for dry skin is also advised by the NHS (see sources).

04

Oil massage at home

Abhyanga is the Ayurvedic oil massage. In winter it is probably the most repeated habit in the texts.

The **Ashtanga Hridaya** says to massage with oils that calm vata, to oil the head, and to knead the body, each in the right measure. The **Charaka Samhita** compares an oiled body to a clay pot, a piece of leather or a cart axle that has been oiled: firm, smooth and able to bear hardship.

How to do it

1. Warm a small bowl of sesame oil in a larger bowl of hot water. It should feel just above body temperature.
2. Start at the head and neck, then work down the arms and torso.
3. Use straight strokes on long bones and small circles on joints. On the belly, go in gentle clockwise circles.
4. Give your feet the most time. Ten to twenty minutes in all.
5. Bathe with warm water afterwards and pat dry. Use a towel you do not mind staining.



Trutatva Body Brightening Oil. A face and body massage oil with cold-pressed white sesame, neem and sandalwood oils, manjistha, palash flowers, kasturi manjal and vetiver.

Skip it during a fever, skin infection, fresh injury or open wound, a heavy cold with a blocked chest, or while recovering from surgery. The classical text also says to avoid it with indigestion. Heavy oiling as part of Panchakarma is done under a vaidya and is a different thing from home massage.

What the evidence says. We looked for research showing that sesame-oil massage prevents winter dryness or stiffness, and did not find any. A 2024 review of four trials found it reduced pain after limb injury, with moderate certainty. That is a different situation, so we treat abhyanga as tradition and comfort, not proven treatment.

Sources: Ashtanga Hridaya Sutrasthana 2 and 3; Charaka Samhita Sutrasthana 5; Razani et al., International Wound Journal, 2024 (see sources).

What to eat, and what to go slow on

The texts favour sweet, sour and salty tastes, oily food and warm meals in winter.

EAT MORE OF

- Ghee, in a spoonful or two a day
- Milk and milk products
- New rice and wheat
- Black gram (urad) and moong
- Sesame, in food and oil
- Sugarcane products and honey, in small amounts
- Dry ginger, black pepper, cumin
- Warm soups and cooked vegetables

GO SLOWER ON

- Cold drinks and cold water straight after activity
- Very dry, very light food
- Skipping meals or living on thin gruels
- Long hours in cold wind
- Too much sleep in the daytime



Heavier food assumes a good appetite. If your digestion is weak, keep portions small. If you have diabetes, high cholesterol or a heart condition, go easy on sweets and extra ghee and follow your vaidya or physician's advice.

Source: Charaka Samhita and Ashtanga Hridaya on Hemanta, as summarised in the Trutatva Hemant Ritu article. The classical lists are traditional guidance. We did not find trials testing them as a set.

06

The winter pantry

Eight everyday ingredients, what tradition says about them, and who should be careful.

INGREDIENT	WHAT TRADITION SAYS	GO CAREFULLY IF
Sesame (til)	Sweet, heavy, oily and warming in the texts, and thought to soothe vata. Also a real source of calcium and iron.	Avoid with sesame allergy. Go slow with acidity or pitta, and in pregnancy ask your vaidya about larger amounts.
Ghee	The classic winter fat. A spoonful on dal or roti is the traditional way.	Keep it small with diabetes, high cholesterol or heart conditions.
Dry ginger (sonth)	A warming spice used to wake up a slow appetite.	Go slow if you have acidity.
Black pepper	Added in tiny amounts to milk, soups and khichdi.	Leave it out when you have acidity.
Jaggery (gud)	The traditional winter sweetener, used in laddu.	It is still sugar. People with diabetes should be careful and ask their vaidya or physician.
Turmeric (haldi)	Everyday in cooking and in haldi doodh. Curcumin is poorly absorbed on its own, and fat and black pepper help.	Large doses or supplements need care with gallbladder problems, blood thinners, diabetes medicines and pregnancy.
Moong dal	Light and easy to digest, the base of khichdi.	Can cause gas in some people. Hing, cumin and ginger help.
Gond (edible gum)	Used in winter laddu, especially after childbirth in many homes.	Crush it fine. Hard pieces are a choking risk for children and older people.

Properties are as described in the classical texts and Ayurvedic references we cite on page 19. They are traditional descriptions, not claims that a food treats any condition. Jaggery is still sugar; treat it as such.

07 · RECIPE ONE

Moong dal khichdi

Plain, warm and easy on the stomach. A good dinner when digestion feels low.

YOU WILL NEED

- ½ cup rice
- ½ cup split yellow moong
- 1 tbsp ghee
- ½ tsp cumin seeds
- ½ inch fresh ginger
- ¼ tsp turmeric
- A pinch of hing
- About 4 cups water
- Salt to taste

METHOD

1. Rinse the rice and moong together and soak for 20 minutes.
2. Heat the ghee in a pressure cooker. Add cumin and let it crackle, then the ginger and hing.
3. Add the rice, moong, turmeric, salt and water.
4. Cook for three whistles, then let the pressure fall on its own.
5. Mash lightly. Serve warm with a little more ghee.
6. For winter, add a pinch of black pepper, a little dry ginger and some soft vegetables.



Who should go slow. With diabetes, use less rice and more dal, and ask your vaidya or physician about portions. Moong can cause gas in some people, and hing, cumin and ginger help. A long illness needs a vaidya, not a bowl of khichdi. We found no clinical trials on khichdi, so we make no health claim for it.

Haldi doodh

A home drink, and a comforting one. We did not find it named as a formula in the classical texts.

YOU WILL NEED

- 1 cup (about 240 ml) milk
- ½ tsp turmeric powder, or a little grated fresh turmeric
- A small pinch of black pepper
- ¼ tsp ghee (optional)
- ½ tsp jaggery (optional)
- A few saffron strands to finish (optional)

METHOD

1. Warm the milk on a low flame with the turmeric and pepper.
2. Simmer gently for four to five minutes. Stir so it does not stick.
3. Add the ghee and jaggery if you like, and stir until they dissolve.
4. Pour and drink warm, not boiling hot.
5. If you add honey, wait until the milk has cooled. Ayurveda advises against heating honey.

What the research says. Curcumin is poorly absorbed on its own, and fat and piperine from pepper help. We found no solid trials showing a cup of turmeric milk prevents or treats colds. Turmeric in food is generally considered safe. Concentrated supplements have been linked to rare cases of liver injury (Northwestern Medicine, see sources). Treat the drink as comfort, not treatment.



Warm, golden and simple. Comfort in a cup, not a treatment.

Who should go slow. People with gallbladder or bile duct problems, those on blood thinners or diabetes medicines, and anyone planning surgery should check with their vaidya or physician first. In pregnancy, avoid turmeric supplements and large amounts. Leave out the pepper if you have acidity. Milk allergy and lactose intolerance rule it out.

07 · RECIPE THREE

Til ke laddu

Sesame and jaggery, the classic winter sweet. Makes about ten.

YOU WILL NEED

- 1 cup sesame seeds (about 150 g)
- ¾ cup jaggery (about 100 g)
- 1 tbsp ghee
- A pinch of cardamom powder

METHOD

1. Dry roast the sesame on a low flame for four to five minutes, until it smells nutty. Keep stirring so it does not burn.
2. Warm the ghee and jaggery with two spoons of water until the jaggery melts. Cook for a minute.
3. Add the sesame and cardamom and mix well.
4. Let it cool just enough to handle. Grease your palms and shape into laddu while still warm.
5. Store in an airtight box for about two weeks. One or two small laddu a day is plenty.



Who should go slow. Anyone with diabetes should ask their vaidya or physician first. Jaggery is a sugar, not a health food. Go slow with acidity or pitta. In pregnancy, ask a vaidya about amounts. If you are on a weight-loss plan, count them as a sweet. Sesame allergy means avoid completely. We found no studies on til laddu itself. Sesame seeds are a real source of calcium, iron and fat, and the texts call them warming.

Gond ke laddu

A richer laddu, made in many homes for winter strength. Makes about twelve.

YOU WILL NEED

- 3 tbsp gond (about 30 g)
- ½ cup ghee
- 1 cup whole wheat flour (atta)
- ¾ cup jaggery powder
- ¼ cup chopped almonds
- ¼ cup dry coconut, grated
- ½ tsp dry ginger powder
- ½ tsp cardamom powder

METHOD

1. Heat a little ghee and fry the gond on a low flame until it puffs up. Cool and crush it fine.
2. In the rest of the ghee, roast the atta on a low flame until it turns golden and smells toasted.
3. Add the almonds and coconut and stir for a minute. Turn the flame off.
4. Mix in the crushed gond, dry ginger and cardamom. Add the jaggery powder once the pan has cooled a little, so it does not turn hard.
5. Shape into laddu while warm. Keeps for two to three weeks. One a day is enough.



Who should go slow. Crush the gond fine. Hard bits are a choking risk for children and older people. Gond is not the same as gond katira. These laddu are rich, so go easy with diabetes, high cholesterol or weight concerns, and with acidity. After childbirth, ask your vaidya about amounts. We found no controlled human studies. Strength and postpartum use come from home tradition.

08

Skin and lips

Dry winter skin is common, and the basics matter more than any product.

What dermatology also says

- Cold air and indoor heating dry the skin.
- Moisturise often, and straight after a bath while the skin is still slightly damp.
- Keep baths short and lukewarm. Hot water strips the skin.
- Use a mild cleanser. Avoid scrubbing.
- A damp towel near a heater can add some moisture to a dry room.
- Wear sunscreen in winter too.

What Ayurveda adds

- Warm sesame oil on the body before the bath, if your skin tolerates it.
- Enough ghee and good fats in food.
- Warm water and a regular routine.
- Udvartana, a dry herbal powder massage, is traditional for oily skin and heavy kapha.

Lips

Cold, windy air dries the lips. Use a balm often, preferably in a stick or tube rather than a pot. Cover your mouth with a scarf in the wind, and try not to lick or pick. Use SPF 30 or more when you are outdoors for long. Our two lip balms are below, with everything that goes into them.

> **See someone** if dry, cracked or itchy skin spreads over a large area and lasts more than two weeks, if skin cracks or bleeds, if itching disturbs your sleep, or if you see thick, red, scaly patches. Lips that are red, sore or look infected, or a sore that does not heal, also need a check.



Almond Lip Balm

Beeswax, cocoa butter, shea butter, cold-pressed sweet almond oil, cold-pressed coconut oil, castor oil and sweet almond extract.



Strawberry Lip Balm

Beeswax, cocoa butter, shea butter, cold-pressed coconut oil, cold-pressed sweet almond oil, strawberry seed oil and strawberry fruit extract.

Sources: NHS patient information on dry skin; British Skin Foundation; nidirect (NHS content) on lips. Details on page 19. Ayurvedic points are traditional and are not claims of treatment.

Hair and scalp

A flaky scalp in winter is very common. It helps to know what is actually going on.

Dandruff is mostly the skin on your scalp renewing faster than usual. It is not caused by poor hygiene. Cold weather and stress can make it worse. Flaking can also come from other scalp conditions, such as eczema, psoriasis or a fungal infection.



What helps, according to the NHS

- An anti-dandruff shampoo, left on for at least five minutes and used for about a month.
- Seeing your vaidya or physician if there is no improvement after a month, or if the scalp is very itchy, red or swollen.

Where oil fits

Hair oil is not a dandruff treatment. In Ayurveda the dandruff-like scalp condition is called *darunaka*, and the Ashtanga Hridaya, in its daily routine chapter, says to oil the head, the ears and the feet, but not when kapha is in excess or you have indigestion. Think of oiling as scalp comfort.

- Do a patch test first.
- Warm the oil slightly, and start with one to two hours, not overnight.
- Once or twice a week is enough.
- Stop if itching or flaking gets worse.

> **From our shelf.** Aaroh is our sesame-based Ayurvedic hair oil, made as a winter oil. It has cold-pressed black sesame oil and castor oil, with bhringraj, amla, brahmi, hibiscus, henna, vetiver, lodhra, neem, methi, manjistha and other herbs. It is a hair oil, not a medicine or a dandruff treatment.

Sources: nidirect (NHS content) on dandruff; Ashtanga Hridaya Sutrasthana 2. Science on traditional hair oils is limited.

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Sleep and the evening

The Ayurvedic night routine is called ratricharya. It is simple, and much of it matches ordinary sleep advice.

An easy evening

- Eat dinner two to three hours before bed, warm and lighter than lunch.
- Take a slow ten-minute walk.
- Dim the lights and put screens away about an hour before bed.
- Rub a little warm sesame oil or ghee on your feet. It is a traditional habit that people find calming. Scientific evidence for it is limited.
- Sleep at about the same time each night, in a dark, quiet and comfortably cool room.

ALSO USEFUL

- Keep caffeine and alcohol away from the evening.
- Drink water through the day, and ease off in the last hour or two before bed.
- If you did stay up late, the Ashtanga Hridaya suggests sleeping half that time the next morning, before eating.

If sleep does not improve. If a few weeks of better habits have not helped, if trouble sleeping has lasted for months, or if it makes daily life hard, see your vaidya or physician.



Sources: Ashtanga Hridaya, Sutrasthana 7; NHS guidance on insomnia and sleep habits; Sleep Foundation on hydration and sleep.

Your winter checklist

Print this page and stick it on the fridge. Tick what you did today.

EVERY MORNING

- [ ] Warm water
- [ ] Oil on arms, legs and feet (10 min)
- [ ] Warm bath
- [ ] A few minutes of sun
- [ ] A proper breakfast

THROUGH THE DAY

- [ ] Lunch as the main meal
- [ ] Ghee on dal or roti
- [ ] Head and ears covered outside
- [ ] Some movement

EVERY EVENING

- [ ] Early, warm, lighter dinner
- [ ] One til or gond laddu, not more
- [ ] A ten-minute walk
- [ ] Screens away an hour before bed
- [ ] Warm oil on the feet
- [ ] Lights out at the usual time

ONCE OR TWICE A WEEK

- [ ] Scalp oiling, if it suits you
- [ ] Moong dal khichdi night
- [ ] Check lips and heels



Do what you can. Two habits done well beat ten done for a week.

12

When to see a vaidya

Home habits are for ordinary winter discomfort. These are the signs that need a proper check.

WHAT YOU NOTICE	WHEN TO GET IT SEEN
Dry or itchy skin	Widespread, cracked or itchy skin lasting more than two weeks. Skin that cracks or bleeds, itching that wakes you, or thick, red, scaly patches.
Flaky scalp	No improvement after a month of an anti-dandruff shampoo, or a scalp that is very itchy, red or swollen.
Lips	Red, sore or possibly infected lips, or a sore that will not heal.
Stiff joints	Stiffness that stays, swelling, or pain that wakes you at night. Do not assume it is just the cold.
Cough or breathlessness	A cough, phlegm or shortness of breath that comes on in the cold and persists. Chest pain or difficulty breathing needs emergency help.
Sleep	Trouble sleeping that has lasted for months, or that makes everyday life hard.
Food and medicines	Before large amounts of sesame, ghee, jaggery or turmeric if you have diabetes, gallbladder problems, high cholesterol, take blood thinners, or are pregnant.

> This guide never replaces your vaidya or physician. If you take regular medicines, tell your vaidya about any herbs or supplements you use, and tell your physician about your Ayurvedic treatment.



Sources

Classical texts are cited by chapter because verse numbers differ between editions. Ayurvedic statements in this guide are traditional descriptions and are not claims that any food or oil treats a condition.

Classical texts

- Charaka Samhita, Sutrasthana 5 (daily routine) and 6 (seasonal routine).
- Ashtanga Hridaya, Sutrasthana 2 (daily routine), 3 (seasonal routine) and 7 (sleep and routine).
- Bhavaprakasha Nighantu, on moong, as cited in our moong dal khichdi article.

Modern sources

Dry skin, emollients, bathing, when to seek advice	NHS patient information, Shropshire, Telford and Wrekin. shropshiretelfordandwrekin.nhs.uk/self-care/mild-dry-skin
Winter skin barrier, moisturiser, lip balm	British Skin Foundation. britishskinfoundation.org.uk (winter skin conditions)
Chapped lips	nidirect, NHS content. nidirect.gov.uk/node/11428
Dandruff	nidirect, NHS content. nidirect.gov.uk/conditions/dandruff
Sesame-oil massage and pain after limb injury	Razani et al., International Wound Journal, 2024; 21(6): e14907
Turmeric supplements and the liver	Northwestern Medicine. nm.org (Are turmeric and curcumin supplements safe for your liver)
Insomnia and sleep habits	NHS. nhs.uk/conditions/insomnia
Hydration and sleep	Sleep Foundation. sleepfoundation.org/physical-health/hydration-and-sleep
Osteoarthritis stiffness	NHS. nhs.uk/conditions/osteoarthritis
Cold air and breathing	Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly ICB. cios.icb.nhs.uk

What we could not find. Good evidence that warm water on waking has a benefit, or that sesame-oil massage prevents winter dryness. We have said so in the guide and kept both as traditional habits.



More guides on hair, skin, digestion and seasonal care are waiting on our Learn pages.

trutatva.in/pages/learn-ayurveda

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