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DO YOU HAVE THE WINTER BLUES?

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Did you ever have one of those days where it seems like everything (and I mean everything) goes wrong? You wake up and it's cold, dark and you think it must be the middle of the night, but it's really morning. You don't want to come out from under the covers, but eventually you do... And, you're hungry!

That's the way winter is for many of us. Science tells us that light impacts how we feel so it makes sense that our moods and behaviors are influenced by weather and seasonal changes.

Our bodies produce less serotonin when there are shorter days and less sunlight. Serotonin is a neurotransmitter that regulates our appetites and cravings. Sometimes called the "happiness hormone" (even though it isn't a hormone), serotonin helps create our feelings of well being. So, it makes sense that when there's less of it we need more of something to make us feel satisfied.

Winter is definitely the hardest time of year for many people. It's almost like an allergy! Many of us are more tired and sluggish in the winter months than in the summer. We feel less focused and motivated. For some, food becomes the source of comfort. It's at times like these that poor choices are made and unhealthy foods are eaten. Did you know that people actually crave carbohydrates more in the winter season than any other?

Do you have the "winter blues?" Are you wishing away the days, waiting for spring? Or do you feel so overwhelmed that you feel out of control? We can't control the weather and although our moods move in rhythm with the seasons it can help to become aware of the way we are positively and negatively impacted.

Did you make a resolution just last month to lose weight and eat healthy? What happened to it? Are you following through or did something get in the way? Becoming more aware of the food-mood (or mood-food) connection allows us to gain some perspective and control. When we acknowledge the relationship between emotions and eating behaviors we've taken the first step.

I think that one of the most important things to realize is that for many people food is more about feelings than about being hungry. We eat because it's a comfort and makes us feel better for the moment. It takes our attention away from whatever problem or unpleasantness we might be experiencing. It gives us a small reprieve from reality. Sometimes it's not even about taste; it's about having that "mindless moment". And a moment later our mood can change like the winter sky. All we really did

was postpone dealing with something. Now we can add the regret for eating the wrong food and not liking how we look or feel to our complaint list (and that will make us eat more!)

Overeaters eat for many reasons but being hungry isn't usually one of them. Most of us don't go long enough without food to even get hungry! We eat for all kinds of other reasons -- when we're happy and when we're sad, when we're anxious and afraid, when we're bored and stressed, when we are frustrated, excited and angry... Simply put, we're emotional eaters -- people who often eat automatically and without thought.

It's hard to feel motivated or hopeful when your mood is low. That's why it's important to examine the reasons you eat and learn to plan the food choices you make. I teach people to eliminate the foods that make them fat. These are usually the ones they grab first -- the junk food, high in sugar and carbohydrates. These "trigger foods" lead to a downward spiral.

I endorse having NO flour, sugar, gluten or refined carbohydrates because I believe these are the things that cause people to lose their control. They also incite cravings and "addictions." When it comes to food, nobody should ever feel deprived or punished. There's always something "right" to eat! If you know what that means you can be prepared and stock up on foods that will help you. For example, if you have cut up vegetables and fruits available, they are there if you need them. It's easier to fight your mood when you're ready with the "right food". I guarantee you'll feel better about yourself and the kind of day you're having when you reach for that instead of something unhealthy and fattening! Did you know that lean protein is a good choice too? It can also boost your mood! Fish, turkey and chicken are natural sources of tryptophan which is one of the amino acids in the "feel good" serotonin! Make sure you drink plenty of water and get exercise too. Having a plan tells you there is "light at the end of the tunnel."

Don't give in to your negative feelings and fears. Reach beyond them, out of the darkness and into the light. Winter is here but spring is on the way.... Remember -- when your mood is low, your motivation is low and it feels like "feeling good" is so far away. Rather than thinking about tomorrow or "the rest of your life" work on today, one minute, one hour, one meal at a time. The first good step will build to the second and progress begins! Get out and stock your fridge and pantry with healthy food choices. Think about how happy you'll be when you go shopping for spring clothes!

## SHRIMP RATATOUILLE



### INGREDIENTS:

1 lb. eggplant  
¼ lb. zucchini  
1 med green pepper  
1 med onion, chopped  
3 med cloves of garlic, crushed  
1 can (1 lb.) whole tomatoes  
1 tsp salt  
½ tsp chopped basil leaves  
½ tsp crushed red pepper flakes  
1/8 tsp freshly ground pepper  
1 tsp red wine vinegar  
1 lb shrimp, peeled and deveined  
2 tbsp tomato purée

### DIRECTIONS:

Cut eggplant, zucchini and pepper into cubes. In large skillet, sauté cubed vegetables, onion and garlic for 5 minutes. Stir in tomato, salt, basil, pepper flakes, tomato purée and vinegar, breaking tomatoes up with a spoon. Cover and simmer for 20 minutes, stirring occasionally. Stir in shrimp. Cover again and cook 4 minutes or until shrimp turns pink.



Linda Says...



When you want to have a treat  
Make sure it has no wheat or sweet!

# Linda Fiveson

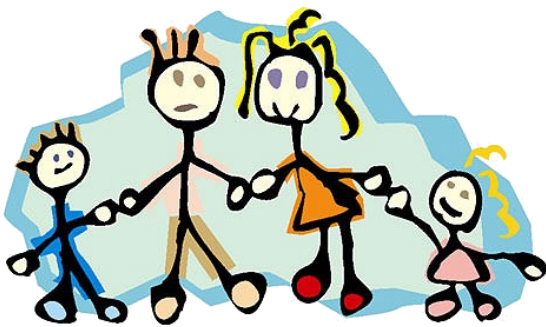
## WORD FIND PUZZLE

Find these words below in the puzzle,  
They go in all directions -- up and down,  
backwards and on slants...

ACTIVITY	FOOD
CHOICES	HEALTHY
COMMITMENT	PATIENCE
CONTROL	PORTION
EXERCISE	PREPARATION
FITNESS	RECIPES

E J O J J T E K U E E Z O C N  
R S S T Y T I V I T C A O O O  
R C I M O Y O H L S V M I F P  
E E F C Q Z E D M Z M T K I R  
C O C I R A A S O I R O S T E  
N A V I L E I L T O X D R N P  
E Z X T P J X M P J F R Q E A  
I B H E F E E E P X S J V S R  
T Y A Y E N S B U S A P K S A  
A L E A T M M T U X C L G J T  
P A U A U R H O M W V Q M L I  
R T C O N T R O L H Q L J S O  
W Q L Y I F H X A Q X V C Z N  
F S E C I O H C B I P Q E W O  
G G H T Q M U B L Y U V Z X Q

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*Linda Fiveson*

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Do you have a question or suggestion? A personal strategy that you use?  
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