Kisetsu (Season to Season): What the Research Says

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How the journal makes season-to-season comparison work

Kisetsu (季節) means "season," and Japanese culture prizes *kisetsukan*, a deep awareness of the seasons. The journal applies that awareness to personal growth: **compare summer to summer, not summer to winter.**

- **A fair comparison.** Your body, mood, energy and activity naturally shift with the seasons. Comparing this winter to last summer sets you up to feel like you are failing; comparing it to last winter shows real progress.
- **A written record.** Memory tends to flatter the present and blur the past. The journal keeps notes season by season, so each year's comparison rests on what actually happened.
- **Built for years.** The journal's long horizon of seven years to rebuild, ten years to master and a lifetime to maintain gives you year after year of seasons to compare, revealing your true long-term trend.
- **Living with the seasons.** Rather than fighting natural rhythms, the journal plans for them, expecting rest in winter and growth in spring and summer.

Bottom line

The human body runs on a yearly cycle. Nearly a quarter of our genes change activity with the seasons, mood rises and falls with daylight, physical activity dips in winter, and one study found most yearly weight gain happened over the winter holidays. Because these shifts are built in, comparing yourself across different seasons is an unfair test. Comparing the same season year to year cancels out those natural swings and reveals genuine progress. A written record matters too, because research shows memory tends to make past selves look worse than they really were.

What the research shows

Your body changes with the seasons

A study of more than 16,000 people across Europe, the United States, Australia and The Gambia found that about 23% of genes tested (5,136 of 22,822) changed activity by season (Dopico et al., 2015). In European winters, the immune system shifted toward a more inflammatory state, with higher levels of markers linked to cardiovascular and autoimmune disease. The authors propose seasons be considered a major factor in human physiology.

Your mood follows the daylight

An analysis of messages from 2.4 million people in 84 countries found that positive mood rose as days lengthened toward summer and fell as they shortened toward winter (Golder & Macy, 2011). The pattern appeared across cultures.

Your activity rises and falls with the weather

A systematic review found that physical activity levels vary with the seasons, and that poor or extreme weather is a common barrier to staying active (Tucker & Gilliland, 2007). The authors warned that studies ignoring season may misrepresent people's true activity levels, the same trap as comparing summer-you to winter-you.

Small winter changes add up year over year

A study of 195 adults weighed four times from fall to spring found most weight was gained during the November-to-January holidays, and it was not lost in the following spring or summer (Yanovski et al., 2000). The net gain averaged about 0.48 kg (roughly 1 pound) per year. Only a same-season, year-over-year comparison reveals this slow, real trend.

Memory flatters the present

Across several studies, people rated their distant past selves more harshly than their current selves, even when records showed no actual improvement (Wilson & Ross, 2001). This is why the journal relies on written seasonal notes rather than memory.

What the research cannot yet show

No study has tested same-season self-comparison as a practice directly; this approach applies the findings above. Seasonal patterns also differ by climate and hemisphere, so each person's seasons are their own.

Disclaimer

This summary is for educational purposes only and is not medical advice. It describes published research on the principles behind the journal; the journal itself has not been tested in a clinical study. Talk with a qualified healthcare provider about your individual health needs.

References

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