



How to Beat the Winter Blues in Seven Steps

Braving the colder temperatures, shorter days, and wind, ice, and snow that winter may bring can have negative effects on your mood - from a little winter blues to the clinical condition of seasonal affective disorder (SAD). In addition to driving people into hibernation mode, seasonal depression can lead to irritability, low energy and motivation, depression, weight gain, and lack of exercise. Thankfully, there are simple lifestyle changes that may help you and your family keep a sunny disposition (and a healthy body), even if it's cold and gray outside. If you're wondering how to beat the winter blues, give these seven tips a try.

Increase Natural Light or Use a Light Box

Fewer daylight hours disrupt your body's natural circadian rhythms and are a major factor in causing winter sadness. Supplementing sunlight with warm lighting at home and at work can help combat dipping moods. Let natural light into your windows by opening window coverings. Sit by the fire for 30 minutes or use a "light box," a device that may mirror the mood-boosting effects of antidepressant medication.

Eat Happy Mood Foods

Eating healthy, nutrient-dense whole foods while avoiding processed and fried foods not only keeps your body and mind running smoothly, but may also play a significant role in staving off depression. A popular option for clean eating is the Mediterranean-style diet, which promotes seasonal and local choices, with a high intake of plant-based foods and olive oil.

Challenge Yourself

The winter months are a great time to check a few things off your personal goals list. From starting a creative solo or family project, learning to play an instrument, writing that novel or joining a fitness or "how-to" class, trying something new can invigorate your spirit and help you steer clear of any ruts!

Exercise to Help Depression

A Harvard University study suggests that a 35-minute walk five times a week, or a one-hour walk three times a week, can dissipate feelings of mild to moderate depression. Whether you prefer to walk, run stairs, stretch, take a yoga class, or do a fitness video in the comfort of your home, physical activity can boost your mood while warming your body from the inside out.

Crank Up the Tunes

Listening to music has a variety of positive effects on the brain. It is also a great motivator to help you get things done around the home, at the gym, or during your workday. Create activity-specific playlists with upbeat or thought-provoking music to put a smile on your face. Then watch the mental fog lift.

Take a Trip

Whether you want to get away from the cold for a bit, or book a spring or summer getaway for yourself or your family, visualizing and planning a trip can help you stay optimistic, deflect today's stress, and give you something fun to look forward to.

Get Outside

Don't let cold weather stop you from getting your nature fix. Bundle up for comfort, then go on a short hike, take a forest walk, or schedule seasonal activities like sledding, ice-skating, skiing, etc. Getting outdoors helps alleviate tension, stimulates your creative brain, and lets you enjoy a change of scenery.

Source: Adapted from "How to Beat the Winter Blues," Frances Bridges, Forbes.com, posted Feb. 25, 2019.

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