

Beating the Winter Blues

If you find your mood dropping along with the temperature, your energy being zapped as autumn's vibrant colors fade or your temper shortening along with the hours of daylight, you are not alone. The winter blues affect one in four Americans to some degree. Not surprisingly, the further from the equator you live, the more likely you are to feel gloomy in the winter. Only about one percent of Floridians report winter-specific discomfort/depression while nearly half report it in the northernmost parts of the country. The winter blues occur on a spectrum, ranging from mild generalized doldrums to the clinical condition called Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD). The distinction is important. Anyone with the blues or SAD may experience fatigue, lethargy, mood downturn, apathy, irritability, overeating, and weight gain and carbohydrate cravings. However, a person with SAD experiences a pattern of clinical depression, occurring only in the winter months, and their symptoms are far more severe. SAD is linked specifically to the biochemical imbalances linked to lack of sunlight. If you believe you may have SAD, see a physician as there are very effective treatments for this condition. Here are some fun ways to help you battle the blues and boost your wintertime wellbeing:

Embrace the season. Many of the happiest communities on the planet are cold for a majority of the year. (Think Canada, Norway, Finland.) If they can embrace the cold, so can you! Our experience relies on our mindset, so set your mind to appreciate the winter. Instead of resisting it, embrace every opportunity to ice skate, sled, ski, etc. And who says the holidays have to mark the end of indoor décor? White twinkle lights and extra greenery in the house can help keep the cozy vibe alive inside all winter.

Create excitement. Be proactive in planning things to look forward to in the winter. Host an indoor theme party, tend to that book and/or movie list you typically wouldn't have time for, schedule a nice hot bath, or try a new comfort food recipe such as soup or stew. Get creative and take charge of scheduling something to look forward to at least a couple of times a week.

Maintain warm-weather habits. While embracing the season can go a long way, so can some determination to maintain warm-weather habits. It may be dark when you are leaving work, but don't go home and call it a night at 6pm; stay active in the evening as you would with more hours of daylight. Brave the outdoors, especially when it's sunny out (even if only for a short time). Lastly, continue to wear bright colors. This may sound silly, but wearing only dark and neutral colors, as many of us tend to do more in the winter, can dampen your mood more than you might think.

Light it up! One of the most common treatments for SAD is bright-light therapy. This therapy utilizes a special fluorescent lamp, often called a sunbox that mimics the sun's rays. This type of lamp can also be an effective remedy for general winter blues. Many people report that a sunbox is well worth the investment. Less exposure to the sun can also lead to Vitamin D deficiency, which further contributes to fatigue, depression and feelings of muscle weakness. Consider a Vitamin D supplement of at least 600 IUs and up to 5,000 IUs daily.*

Get ambitious. Finding ambition in the winter is tough work, no doubt about it. However, trying something new, acting on a resolution or personal goal, or digging in to a new project around the house can be a great way to avoid hibernation and find a sense of meaning and accomplishment in the winter.

Consult with a doctor before supplementing and to determine the dosage that is right for you.

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