

Beat The Winter Blues

Dark mornings, darker evenings, and chilly gray days in between mean winter is here. As the days grow shorter and colder, many of us occasionally experience the winter doldrums or the winter blues. Experts at the National Institutes of Health say the winter blues are fairly common and are usually marked by feeling more down than usual, sad, less energized, or less interested in activities one usually enjoys. It's common to experience fatigue, sadness, difficulty concentrating, and a disruption in your sleep schedule during the winter season.

We tend to spend less time outside and reduce our exposure to light in fall and winter, which disrupts our internal clock. That causes a drop in our brain's serotonin levels, which affects mood. It disrupts our circadian rhythm. Circadian rhythm is your body's natural 24-hour clock that regulates sleep-wake cycles and other systems throughout the body that affect sleep, body temperature, hormones, appetite, and other body functions.

While you may not be able to change the weather or amount of daylight during the winter, you can practice good self-care to help you feel better. Here are some strategies you can try to beat the winter blues.

Unplug

Take periodic breaks from your phone and technology. Temporarily unplugging from the busyness of life can help recharge your batteries and benefit your well-being.

Food

Boost your mood with the food you eat. A balanced diet of complex carbs and healthy proteins supports steady serotonin and melatonin production. Consuming protein with breakfast, lunch, and dinner can enhance mood and prevent sugar and carb cravings later in the day. Also, foods high in vitamin D and vitamin D-fortified foods can help balance your mood.

Sleep Pattern

Without adequate, regular sleep, our circadian rhythm can get disrupted. Tempting as it might be to sleep in on dark mornings, it's best to stick with a regular sleep schedule. Go to bed and wake up at the same time every day. Aim to get seven to eight hours of quality sleep each night to feel refreshed. You can also improve your

sleep quality by avoiding stimulants like coffee, tea, or heavy meals close to bedtime.

Physical Activity

Physical activity has been shown to boost mood, decrease the symptoms of depression, and reduce stress. Start slowly and build up to 30 to 60 minutes a day, five days a week, of aerobic exercise, strength training, or other fitness-related activities. If you feel unmotivated to exercise, break the time up into chunks.

Seek Sunlight

Getting outside daily, even for a few minutes, must be a priority during winter. It can greatly impact your mood and help target symptoms related to a lack of daylight. Being in the sunlight helps balance serotonin activity, increases melatonin production, balances your circadian rhythm, and increases vitamin D levels, which can lead to an improved emotional state.

Stay Social

Getting out of the house and connecting with others is a great way to raise your spirits. Make plans to get lunch once a week with your friends or even grab coffee with coworkers during the day.

Professional Help

If lifestyle modifications and other low-level interventions do not provide enough relief from the winter blues, consider seeking professional help.

With 5 p.m. sunsets, freezing temperatures, and snow, winters in Wyoming are not for the faint of heart. While winter blues symptoms may dissipate in the spring, you shouldn't suffer. You can do many things to help you cope with its symptoms.