

7 Ways to Beat the Winter Blues Today

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Beat the Winter Blues



It happens to even the most cheerful among us: Winter's gray skies and frigid temperatures take a toll, and our moods eventually become as bleak as the weather. Although holing up until spring sounds tempting, we aren't bears. Instead of taking a long winter's nap, incorporate these easy tweaks into your daily routine -- and soon your happy days will be back again.

1. Listen to Music

Whether you're a fan of Michael Jackson or Michael Buble, put on one of their most cheerful songs today. According to a recent British study, people who listened to an uplifting song felt happier after just 15 seconds. Our playlist suggestions: Martina McBride's "Happy Girl," India Arie's "There's Hope" and U2's "Beautiful Day."

2. Get Sun Exposure

"A lack of sunlight can disrupt the body's sleep-wake cycle," says Michael Terman, director of the Center for Light Treatment and Biological Rhythms at Columbia University Medical Center in New York City. "That can lead to sluggishness and depression." Get your body back in sync by soaking up sunlight first thing in the morning. Raise the blinds, eat breakfast in a sunny room or walk a lap around the block before heading into the office. If you're feeling particularly blue, you may want to consider investing in a light therapy box, a device that mimics sunshine. They typically cost between \$100 and \$200.

3. Go Outside

Bundle up for a short stroll in a park or on a tree-lined street. Exercising in nature for a mere five minutes is enough to lift your spirits, say researchers from Britain's University of Essex. Stuck in a snowdrift? Spend some time next to a window that overlooks the backyard. Other research reveals that simply gazing at the great outdoors can increase energy and improve your outlook.

4. Enhance Your Sleep

After you brush your teeth, wash your face and set the alarm, add this move to your bedtime ritual: Lie with your legs leaning up against the wall. "This move relieves stress and boosts circulation, so you can sleep soundly and feel refreshed the next day," says Jamie Segal Hanley, a yoga instructor and owner of Elevate Yoga in Hazlet, N.J. Start by rolling up a blanket and placing it lengthwise next to a wall. Sit on the blanket with your left side against the wall, and knees bent toward your chest. Using your arms for support, place your shoulders on the ground while pivoting your feet up the wall. Inhale and exhale -- to the count of six -- for five to 15 minutes.

5. Exercise

Before you make plans with your couch and remote, consider this: A recent study from The University of Vermont shows that exercise can give you that post-workout glow for up to 12 hours. You don't have to go for a grueling run in the snow to reap those benefits. Exercisers got that effect from just 20 minutes of moderate cycling on a stationary bike.

6. Eat Nuts

"Walnuts, along with flax and fatty fish, are high in omega-3s," says Sharon Richter, a registered dietitian in New York City. These

healthy fats -- which are found in brain cells -- have been linked to assuaging symptoms of depression, so toss some nuts in your salad. Plus, the folic acid in spinach can also chase away the blues. For an even bigger boost, pair your salad with a whole-grain roll. “Carbs increase the production of the feel-good brain chemical serotonin,” says Richter.

7. Enjoy Your Peers

Make it a point to pal around! Not only can sharing a joke instantly brighten your spirits, but studies also show that simply anticipating that chuckle can lessen stress. Schedule a weekly phone date with your most upbeat pal. Her cheerful mood will rub off on you. In fact, Harvard researchers found that spending more time with a chipper person may increase your likelihood of happiness.

Sharon Liao is an award-winning health editor and writer who has been on staff at Prevention, Fitness, and Reader's Digest magazines. She has contributed to Seventeen and Weight Watchers Magazine, as well as The Intellectual Devotional: Health.

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