

Beat the Blues

By Woodland Publishing, Inc.

As the days grow shorter, does your supply of energy dwindle? Sometimes when the skies grow darker our moods darken as well. Many adults suffer from a seasonal mood disorder commonly known as the “winter blues,” which experts suggest is caused by decreased exposure to sunlight. Other possible symptoms include: decreased energy, a tendency to overeat, cravings for sweet and starchy foods, and apathy towards social interaction and other once-enjoyable activities.

Fortunately, seasonal depression can be cured. For severe cases, medication and light boxes (which imitate the effects of sunlight) may be necessary. However, for mild cases, treatment is much simpler. The following are a few ideas to help you beat the blues.

Get a good night’s sleep. Sticking to a consistent sleep schedule goes a long way towards improving mood and boosting energy levels during the winter. Go to sleep at the same time every night, and wake up at the same time every morning. Avoid caffeine in the late afternoon and evening, and unwind for an hour before going to bed. In the morning, open the curtains as soon as possible to let in the sun’s mood-lifting rays. Aim for 7–8 hours of sleep each night, and fight the temptation to stay in bed on cold winter mornings.

Watch what you eat. Carbohydrates increase the level of serotonin in the brain, which may explain why the winter blues are often accompanied by a craving for sweets. However, over-indulging your sweet tooth can lower energy levels and lead to weight gain. For a better serotonin boost, try adding more complex carbohydrates to your diet in the form of whole grains and fresh vegetables. If you get hungry between meals, ditch the candy in favor of whole-wheat crackers or your favorite fruit.

Get outside and exercise. In a study conducted by Duke University, aerobic exercise was shown to be as effective as medication in treating major depression. Exercise is also effective in treating milder cases of depression—raising your heart rate will raise your spirits. Daily exercise is best for fighting the blues, but most people benefit from as little as three thirty-minute sessions per week.

The benefits of exercise are compounded outdoors. Exposure to natural light is one of the most effective ways to fight seasonal mood changes, and even on cloudy days there is enough sunlight to lift your spirits.

Go for a walk. Take advantage of your lunch break to enjoy a brisk walk and a breath of fresh air. With the proper clothing, only the worst of weather can keep you indoors. If you’re feeling adventurous, give snowshoeing a try. Unlike walking, snowshoeing allows you to venture off the beaten path. In addition, snowshoes increase resistance, which means that you get more out of your workout in the same time.

As a final warning, although many people suffer from mild cases the winter blues, others suffer from a severe clinical depression known as seasonal affective disorder, or SAD. If, during the winter months, you find that life loses its pleasure, or that you have difficulty functioning normally, you may be one of these people. But don’t worry—help is available. If you suspect that you are a victim of SAD, contact a health professional for diagnosis and information about possible treatments to get you back on the path to an enjoyable life.