

Understanding the Winter Blues

As winter sets in, many people experience a dip in mood and energy. The lack of sunlight, cold weather, and general shift in routine can leave us feeling more tired, isolated, or less motivated. The winter blues may show up as irritability, low energy, trouble sleeping, and even changes in appetite.

For some, this might be a mild feeling that passes with time, but for others, it can be a bit more challenging. Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD), a type of depression that typically emerges in the fall or winter, can make it harder to get through the day. Here's how to manage those winter blues and keep your mental health in check as the days grow colder.

Get Some Light Exposure

- Lack of sunlight is one of the main contributors. Sunlight triggers the release of serotonin (our “feel-good” hormone), which is why we tend to feel better and more energized on sunny days. When sunlight becomes scarce, it can affect mood and energy levels.
- Maximize natural light: Spend time outside during daylight hours, even if it's just for a short walk.
- Consider light therapy: Light therapy boxes mimic sunlight and can be especially helpful for people with SAD. You can use one for about 20–30 minutes in the morning to help regulate your sleep-wake cycle and boost your mood.

Move Your Body

- Exercise might be the last thing on your mind when it's cold outside, but moving your body can really help elevate your mood. Physical activity increases endorphins, reduces stress, and combats feelings of depression.
- Indoor workouts: The gym or home workouts are great. Try yoga, Pilates, or even dancing around your living room. Anything that gets you moving daily can help. Any amount of time is better than no time!
- Outdoor fun: If you enjoy winter sports like skiing, snowboarding, or even ice skating, make the most of them! These activities not only keep you active, but can also be a fun way to embrace the season.



Embracing Winter

Embrace the Cozy Vibes!

Sometimes, leaning into the winter vibes can actually be a big help. Embrace cozy moments like enjoying a warm cup of tea, lighting a candle, or watching your favorite winter movie. Giving yourself permission to slow down can create a sense of calm and comfort in a season that might feel draining. And remember, spring is coming soon!

The winter blues are completely normal, but that doesn't mean you have to just “wait it out.” With some simple adjustments to your routine and mindset, you can make the most of the season and take care of your mental and emotional well-being.

Remember: Winter doesn't have to be about feeling isolated or low—take small steps each day to stay connected, active, and nourished. Stay warm, stay bright, and take care of yourself!

Pay Attention to Your Skin Care

- Cold, dry air can take a serious toll on your skin, making it feel rough and dehydrated. Late winter is the time to show your skin some extra love.
- Moisturize often: Look for richer, more hydrating creams or oils that help lock in moisture.
- Use a humidifier: Indoor heating can dry out the air, so using a humidifier in your bedroom at night can help maintain hydration in your skin and respiratory system.
- Gentle exfoliation: Consider exfoliating once a week to remove dead skin cells, allowing moisturizers to penetrate more effectively. Don't forget your lips, too—chapped lips are a winter staple. Keep them hydrated with a nourishing balm!

Stay Connected and Social

Isolation can make the winter blues worse, so it's important to maintain social connections. Even if the weather makes it harder to meet up in person, technology can help bridge the gap.

- Virtual hangouts: Schedule regular calls or video chats with friends or family.
- Join a class or hobby group: Look for indoor activities like cooking classes, book clubs, or crafting sessions that can get you out of the house and connecting with others.

Prioritize Sleep

- In the winter months, we tend to spend more time indoors, and the temptation to sleep in, take long naps, or go to bed when it gets dark and stay there until it gets light can make our sleep schedule a bit erratic. However, lack of quality sleep can worsen feelings of fatigue and low mood.
- Stick to a consistent sleep schedule, even on weekends. 7 to 8 hours is ideal.
- Create a relaxing bedtime routine to unwind—this could be reading, listening to calming music, or using essential oils like lavender to promote relaxation.
- Avoid blue light from phones and screens at least an hour before bed, as it can interfere with your sleep.

Eat Foods That Boost Your Mood

Certain foods have a positive impact on your mood and energy levels, which can help combat the winter blues. Focus on nutrient-dense foods that support brain health and overall well-being.



Hearty Lentil and Veggie Soup

Ingredients:

- 1 cup dried lentils, rinsed
- 2 tbsp olive oil
- 1 onion, chopped
- 2 carrots, chopped
- 2 celery stalks, chopped
- 2 garlic cloves, minced
- 1 sweet potato, peeled and diced
- 1 zucchini, chopped
- 1 can diced tomatoes (14.5 oz)
- 4 cups vegetable broth
- 1 tsp dried thyme
- 1/2 tsp cumin
- Salt and pepper to taste
- Fresh parsley, for garnish

Instructions:

In a large pot, heat the olive oil over medium heat. Add the onion, carrots, celery, and garlic. Sauté for 5–7 minutes, until softened.

Add the sweet potato, zucchini, lentils, diced tomatoes, vegetable broth, thyme, and cumin. Bring to a boil.

Reduce heat to low, cover, and simmer for 30–40 minutes until the lentils are tender and the soup has thickened. Add salt and pepper to taste.

Serve with fresh parsley and enjoy!

- Omega-3 fatty acids (found in fish such as salmon, walnuts, and flaxseeds) can support brain health and reduce symptoms of depression.
- Complex carbohydrates (like whole grains, sweet potatoes, and legumes) provide steady energy and stabilize blood sugar.
- Dark chocolate! What a delight! It can boost your mood and also has health benefits such as maintaining blood sugar levels. (Milk chocolate does not have the same benefits.) 1-2 oz per day.
- Vitamin D-rich foods: Since winter often means less exposure to the sun, eating foods high in Vitamin D like fortified dairy, eggs, and mushrooms can help maintain your mood.

Spring Clean Your Routine

Late winter is the perfect time to declutter and refresh your daily habits. Think of it as a mini “spring cleaning” for your body and mind.

- Organize your space: Clean up your home or workspace to create a calm, fresh environment. Decluttering can have a positive impact on your mental clarity and help lift your spirits.
- Evaluate your goals: Take stock of your physical and mental health goals. How have you been feeling lately? Do you need to shift your focus or try something new to maintain motivation?
- Try something new: Late winter is a great time to explore a new hobby or learning activity. This can keep your mind engaged and provide a sense of accomplishment.

Prepare for Spring (While Embracing the Now)

As we near the end of winter, it's natural to daydream about spring—warmer weather, more sunlight, and the burst of new energy that comes with it. But it's also helpful to stay grounded and enjoy the present season while preparing for what's to come.

- Start planning spring activities: Get excited about the days ahead by planning outdoor activities like hiking, picnics, or weekend trips. The anticipation of warmer weather can help combat winter fatigue.
- Set spring health goals: Think about how you'd like to transition into spring—whether that's getting more active outdoors or focusing on eating more fresh produce as it becomes available.

Practice Mindfulness & Stress Reduction

Winter can be a time for introspection, but it can also bring about



Crispy Baked Salmon with Lemon and Dill

Ingredients:

- 2 salmon fillets
- 1 tbsp olive oil
- 1 lemon, thinly sliced
- 1 tbsp fresh dill, chopped (or 1 tsp dried dill)
- Salt and pepper to taste
- Optional: Fresh parsley for garnish

Instructions:

- Preheat your oven to 375°F (190°C). Line a baking sheet with parchment paper or foil.
- Place the salmon fillets on the prepared baking sheet. Drizzle with olive oil and season with salt, pepper, and dill.
- Lay lemon slices on top of each fillet.
- Bake for 12–15 minutes, or until the salmon easily flakes with a fork.
- Garnish with fresh parsley before serving.

stress, especially around the holidays. Mindfulness techniques can help you stay grounded and focused on the present moment, rather than getting overwhelmed by the season.

- **Meditation:** Even just 10 minutes of meditation each morning can help you start the day on a positive note.
- **Breathing exercises:** Simple deep-breathing exercises or progressive muscle relaxation can help calm anxiety and reduce stress. Look for apps or check out YouTube for guided sessions.

Boosting Immunity Through Nutrition

Boosting immunity is a great goal, and nutrition plays a huge role in supporting the body's natural defenses. Here's a list of foods and supplements that can help, and as always, check with your doctor before starting something new.

Foods For Boosting Immunity:

- **Citrus Fruits** are rich in vitamin C, which is crucial for the production and function of white blood cells, a key player in immune response. Examples include oranges, grapefruits, lemons, limes, and tangerines.
- **Garlic** contains allicin, which has antibacterial and antiviral properties. Garlic has been linked to enhancing immune function and fighting infections. Add it raw to dressings, sauces, or use it to flavor dishes.
- **Ginger** is known for its anti-inflammatory and antioxidant properties, ginger can help boost immune function. Add fresh ginger to smoothies, teas, or stir-fries.
- **Leafy Greens** are packed with vitamins (like vitamin C and folate), antioxidants, and fiber that help maintain immune function. Examples are spinach, kale, Swiss chard, and collard greens.
- **Yogurt & Probiotics** - A healthy gut is essential for a strong immune system. Yogurt with live and active cultures can help support gut health. Look for plain, unsweetened yogurt or take a high-quality probiotic supplement.
- **Almonds** are a great source of vitamin E, which is important for maintaining healthy immune function. They also provide antioxidants that protect cells from damage. Snack on raw almonds or add to salads and dishes.



Roasted Butternut Squash and Chickpea Salad

Ingredients:

- 1 medium butternut squash, peeled and cubed
- 1 can chickpeas, drained and rinsed
- 2 tbsp olive oil
- 1 tsp smoked paprika
- Salt and pepper to taste
- 4 cups mixed greens (spinach, arugula, etc.)
- 1/4 cup crumbled feta cheese (optional)
- 2 tbsp pumpkin seeds or sunflower seeds
- 2 tbsp tahini
- 1 tbsp lemon juice
- 1 tsp maple syrup
- 2 tbsp water

Instructions:

Preheat the oven to 400°F.

On a baking sheet, toss the butternut squash cubes and chickpeas with olive oil, smoked paprika, salt, and pepper. Roast for 25–30 minutes, tossing half-way through, until the squash is tender and golden.

In a small bowl, whisk together the tahini, lemon juice, maple syrup, and water until smooth.

To serve, place the mixed greens in a bowl, top with the roasted squash and chickpeas, crumbled feta (if using), and seeds. Drizzle with tahini dressing.

- **Red Bell Peppers** are rich in vitamin C (even more than citrus fruits), which plays a vital role in the immune system. Add raw to salads or sauté in dishes.
- **Turmeric** contains curcumin, a compound with powerful anti-inflammatory and antioxidant properties that help strengthen the immune system. Use it in curries, soups, smoothies, or as a golden milk drink.
- **Mushrooms** like shiitake, maitake, and reishi, are known to enhance immune system activity. Incorporate into soups, stir-fries, or simply roasted.
- **Berries** are high in antioxidants, particularly vitamin C and flavonoids, which help reduce inflammation and support immune function. Examples include blueberries, strawberries, raspberries, and blackberries.

Supplements for Boosting Immunity

- **Vitamin C** is a well-known immune booster that enhances the function of immune cells and acts as a potent antioxidant. How to take: As a daily supplement (500-1000 mg), or through food like citrus, berries, and bell peppers.
- **Vitamin D** supports immune cell function, and low levels have been associated with increased susceptibility to infections. How to take: Daily doses between 1000-2000 IU, especially during winter months when sunlight exposure is limited.
- **Zinc** is essential for immune cell development and function. Zinc deficiency can impair immune response. How to take: Zinc supplements (15-30 mg) can be taken daily but be cautious of high doses.
- **Elderberry** is known for its antiviral properties, elderberry can help reduce the duration and severity of colds. How to take: As a syrup, capsule, or tea.
- **Probiotics** contribute to a healthy gut microbiome, which supports a strong immune system. How to take: Look for multi-strain probiotics with at least 10 billion CFU.
- **Echinacea** is traditionally used to prevent or shorten the duration of colds and flu, Echinacea may enhance immune response. How to take: Available in tea, capsules, or tinctures.



Lifestyle Tips For Immunity

- **Stay hydrated:** Drinking water supports all bodily functions, including immune system performance.
- **Get enough sleep:** Poor sleep can suppress immune function, while good sleep supports immune responses.
- **Exercise regularly:** Moderate exercise boosts immune function, while too much intense exercise can suppress it.

Key Takeaway

A diet rich in nutrient-dense foods combined with strategic supplementation can help boost immunity. Focus on whole foods first, and then consider supplements if needed, particularly for nutrients like vitamin D, zinc, and probiotics. Maintaining a healthy lifestyle with adequate sleep, hydration, and moderate exercise will also make a big difference!

- **Andrographis** is an herb has been used in traditional medicine for its immune-boosting and anti-inflammatory properties. How to take: Typically, in supplement form.
- **Astaxanthin** is a potent antioxidant derived from algae, it helps reduce oxidative stress and inflammation, promoting immune health. How to take: Available in supplement form.
- **Selenium** is an important mineral that helps regulate the immune response and protect against oxidative stress. How to take: 50-200 mcg daily, commonly found in Brazil nuts.
- **Spirulina** is a type of blue-green algae packed with vitamins, minerals, and antioxidants that support immune health. How to take: Typically available in powder or tablet form.

Fitness Myth Busters

Myth: “You can spot-reduce fat”

The Truth: You can’t target fat loss from specific areas of the body, no matter how many crunches you do. Fat loss happens evenly across your body as a result of a calorie deficit, not from targeted exercises. Want to lose belly fat? Focus on overall weight loss through a balanced diet and full-body exercises.

Myth: “You have to work out for at least an hour to see results”

The Truth: Quality matters more than quantity. You can achieve great results with just 20-30 minutes of intense exercise, especially if you’re focusing on compound movements (like squats, push-ups, and deadlifts) or high-intensity interval training (HIIT). Short but efficient workouts are just as effective as long sessions!

Myth: “More sweat = better workout”

The Truth: Sweating doesn’t necessarily mean you’re having an effective workout. Sweat is your body’s cooling mechanism, not an indicator of calorie burn. You can have a great workout without sweating buckets, especially in cooler environments or during low-impact activities like yoga or strength training.

Myth: “You should avoid carbs if you’re trying to lose weight”

The Truth: Carbs are an essential part of a balanced diet, providing energy for both daily functions and workouts. Cutting them out entirely can lead to fatigue and even muscle loss. The key is



Warm Quinoa & Roasted Vegetable Buddha Bowl

Ingredients:

- 1 cup quinoa, cooked
- 1 cup broccoli florets
- 1 sweet potato, diced
- 1 red bell pepper, sliced
- 2 tbsp olive oil
- 1 tbsp tahini
- 1 tbsp lemon juice
- 1 tsp maple syrup
- Salt and pepper to taste
- Optional: Avocado slices, sesame seeds, or hummus for topping

Instructions:

Preheat the oven to 400°F.

On a baking sheet, toss the broccoli, sweet potato, and bell pepper with olive oil, salt, and pepper. Roast for 20–25 minutes, until tender and slightly caramelized.

Meanwhile, cook the quinoa according to package directions.

To make the dressing, whisk together the tahini, lemon juice, maple syrup, and a little water to thin it out.

To assemble the bowl, start with a base of quinoa. Add the roasted veggies on top, drizzle with tahini dressing, and garnish with avocado, sesame seeds, or hummus.

to choose healthy carbs (like whole grains, fruits, and vegetables) and eat them in moderation, rather than avoiding them altogether.

Myth: “Cardio is the best way to burn fat”

The Truth: While cardio helps burn calories, strength training is just as important—if not more so—for fat loss. Building lean muscle increases your metabolism and allows you to burn more calories at rest. A balanced routine with both cardio and strength training is the most effective for fat loss and overall health.

Myth: “Fitness is all about burning calories”

The Truth: Fitness is about improving your overall health—strength, flexibility, endurance, and mental well-being. While calorie burn is a factor, focusing solely on calories can be counterproductive. Regular exercise improves mood, energy levels, heart health, and longevity. Don’t just focus on the number on the scale!

Myth: “Muscle weighs more than fat”

The Truth: Actually, a pound is a pound. Muscle is denser than fat, so it takes up less space in the body. If you’re gaining muscle and losing fat at the same time, your weight may stay the same or even increase, but your body composition will be improving. The scale doesn’t always tell the full story!

Myth: “You should push through pain when exercising”

The Truth: It’s normal to feel some discomfort during exercise (like muscle fatigue), but pain is a signal from your body that something isn’t right. Sharp pain, joint pain, or pain that doesn’t subside after rest are warning signs of potential injury. Always listen to your body, and don’t push through pain.

Myth: “If you stop exercising, your muscles turn into fat”

The Truth: Muscles don’t transform into fat. What happens when you stop exercising is that your muscle mass may decrease, and your body might store more fat if your calorie intake doesn’t match your activity level. But there’s no magic transformation of muscle tissue into fat. They are two completely different types of tissue!



Winter Citrus and Spice Smoothie

Ingredients:

- 1 orange, peeled and segmented
- 1/2 grapefruit, peeled and segmented
- 1/2 banana (adds natural sweetness and creaminess)
- 1/2 tsp ground cinnamon
- 1/2 tsp fresh grated ginger (or 1/4 tsp ground ginger)
- 1/4 cup Greek yogurt (for protein and creaminess)
- 1 tbsp honey or maple syrup (optional)
- 1/2 cup unsweetened almond milk (or milk of choice)
- 1/4 cup ice cubes (optional, if you want a colder smoothie)

Instructions:

Add the orange, grapefruit, banana, cinnamon, ginger, Greek yogurt, and almond milk to a blender.

Blend until smooth. If the smoothie is too thick, add a bit more almond milk or water to reach your desired consistency.

Taste and adjust sweetness by adding honey or maple syrup if desired.

If you prefer a colder smoothie, add ice cubes and blend again.

Pour into a glass, sprinkle a little extra cinnamon on top for garnish, and enjoy!