5 Treatments and Strategies for Managing Winter Blues and Seasonal Affective Disorder

Many people struggle with the winter blues, or feelings of sadness and fatigue that are more frequent or persistent in the winter months. In severe cases, the winter blues may actually be a mental health disorder known as Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD). If your symptoms aren’t severe enough for a formal diagnosis, you may have what is known as subsyndromal SAD. If you are struggling with feelings of depression, fatigue, and anxiety that tend to come about and persist throughout the cold winter months, there are several strategies that can help you beat the blues and take your life back.

Stick to Your Schedule

One of the most challenging aspects of SAD or even a mild case of the winter blues is a lack of energy. If you don’t feel like dragging yourself out of bed in the morning, how are you supposed to go for a morning jog? While it’s easier said than done, sticking to your normal routine as much as possible can help you to ward off the symptoms of SAD.

Don’t Neglect Your Basic Needs

Adequate rest, a healthy diet, and regular exercise are important for your overall health and well-being. When you suffer from SAD, it’s easy to allow these basic self-care priorities to fall by the wayside, yet it’s even more crucial that you take care of your body. Your diet can have a big impact on your mood and
your mental health; likewise, exercise can actually boost your attitude and leave you feeling energized. Finally, be sure to stay hydrated to keep your body’s systems in balance.

Aim for Exposure to Sunlight

In the winter months, the days are shorter, so you might be heading to the office while it’s still dark and venturing home after the sun has already gone down for the day. These shorter days make it hard to get much exposure to natural sunlight, yet it’s a lack of sunlight that researchers attribute to the winter blues and SAD. To combat these negative effects, aim to get at least 30 minutes of exposure to either natural sunlight or artificial light similar to sunlight (such as through a light therapy lamp) first thing in the morning.

The Human Charger is another excellent light therapy option for those struggling with SAD. By sending non-UV light through the ear canal directly to light sensitive areas of the brain, users can easily get their body clock back on track. It only takes 12 minutes, and since the device is completely portable you can use it while you work, travel, or even while chatting with a friend. Use it at the same time every day within two hours of waking up, and get the natural boost your body needs to take on the day.

Celebrate Small Wins

When you suffer from the winter blues, getting stuck in the downward spiral of depression is all too easy. To avoid this trap, commit to celebrating the small stuff every day. Journaling is a great way to document what you’re grateful for and what you’ve achieved, or you can also simply write down three things to celebrate at the end of each day and then give yourself a reward (a massage, a piece of chocolate, or whatever makes you smile).

Consider Medication

While some people prefer to do things the natural way, it’s important to recognize when medication might be in order and talk to your healthcare provider. If you continue to struggle with extreme fatigue, anxiety, changes in your sleep habits or appetite, have thoughts of suicide, or feel considerably depressed despite your best efforts to combat your symptoms, talk to your doctor or therapist. Many people are able to successfully manage SAD by taking medications for depression for a few months out of the year.

Remember, there’s no shame in feeling the winter blues or struggling with your energy levels and mood, even in severe cases. Changes in the amount of natural sunlight you’re exposed to can alter the levels of certain chemicals in your brain, resulting in depression or SAD. Don’t be afraid to focus on making some lifestyle changes, adopting an exercise routine, or reaching out to your healthcare provider for help to beat the winter blues for good.

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