

10 Ways to Beat the Winter Blues

When the December air chills you to the bone, it can send your smile into deep hibernation. But simple things, like turning off the TV or calling a friend, can bring your happy back. Here are 10 ways to beat the winter blues

Light Up Your Life

Warm up your winter blues with a little light in your life. A treatment of Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD), light-box therapy mimics the light from outdoors and "is thought to cause a chemical change in the brain that lifts your mood and eases the symptoms of SAD," according to the Mayo Clinic. How should you use it? Let the light-box light shine indirectly toward your eyes for at least 30 minutes each morning. This will not only help adjust your daily sleep cycles, but it will help combat SAD too.

Eat Good-Mood Foods

When you're feeling down, chocolate chip cookies and your mom's warm apple pie are the only things that can console your emotions, right? Wrong. Indulging in emotional eating can actually *trigger* feelings of depression. Instead, start eating a balanced diet of whole grains, lean protein, non-fat dairy and lots of veggies and fruit to boost your mood *and* increase your energy! Plus complex carbs, like oatmeal, help reduce feelings of depression and anxiety by triggering the release of the brain chemical serotonin, states CBS News.

Have a Tea Party

Looking for a drink to warm you up on cold winter nights? Brew a piping hot cup of black tea. In one University College of London study, people who drank as many as four cups of black tea a day were able to de-stress more quickly than those who didn't drink any tea at all. Researchers also found that their blood levels of the stress hormone cortisol were lower. So, not only will teatime increase your natural ability to relax, but it will also boost your mood during this high-stress season (and keep you warm throughout the frigid winter months).

Trim the Fat

When you're feeling down, don't ditch your diet and exercise routine. Redouble your efforts to feel better *and* slim your stomach. A recent study conducted by the University of Alabama Birmingham confirmed that depression is associated with a high BMI and a larger waist circumference, which has also been linked to other serious health issues, like cancer and heart disease.

Fit in Some Fitness

Getting physical has been proven to slow down the body's stress response, causing exercise to have the same effect on the brain as antidepressant drugs, says *Time Magazine*. Just 30 minutes of physical activity 3 to 5 times a week will release feel-good brain chemicals called endorphins that ease depression symptoms, according to the Mayo Clinic. Anything that gets your heart pumping, whether that's shoveling snow or taking the dog for a walk, can help boost your mood and keep symptoms of depression from reoccurring.

Turn Off the Tube

When it comes to a little R&R, don't turn on the television; choose an activity that is just as relaxing but requires a little more mental stimulation. A study conducted by the University of Maryland found that those who choose to watch television in their free time tend to be "unhappy" while those that choose to participate in other activities tend to be "happy." Instead of reverting back to the activity of mindlessly watching the tube during the day, catch up on the world's current events by reading the newspaper or live vicariously through the protagonist of your favorite novel

Get Busy

A recent *Psychological Science* study suggests that those who keep themselves busy are happier than those who choose to remain idle. What to do? Fill in your planner! Gather the family for a friendly board game, tour a local historical landmark or try your hand at cooking a new recipe for you and your loved ones to enjoy.

Lend a Hand

This holiday season; lift your spirits by lending a hand to others. By reaching out to a friend, family member or even someone you don't know, you can increase your "psychological wealth" and reap the same benefits you are bestowing unto others, according to a Kent State study. Write a letter of gratitude, volunteer at a soup kitchen or donate clothes to the less fortunate.

Pal Around

When the going gets tough, you turn to your friends and family for support. But they can help keep you emotionally resilient year-round. Close social ties can reduce stress, boost happiness, improve self-worth, increase your sense of belonging and purpose, and even decrease your risk of developing serious mental illnesses, according to the Mayo Clinic. Next time you're feeling blue, grab a cup of coffee with your sister, call your best friend or make a date with your significant other.

Smile!

The old saying, "If you feel it, you show it, and if you show it, you feel it" seems to hold true. In a 2009 study, psychologists at the University of Cardiff in Wales found that those who have botox injections which hinder their ability to frown are happier, on average, than people who can frown freely. A separate study reported in the journal *Pain* found that people who frowned during an unpleasant procedure reported feeling more pain than people who were told to either smile or keep a neutral expression during the procedure. So turn that frown upside and your mood may do a U-turn as well.



Mediterranean-style grilled salmon

Dietitian's tip: Instead of the usual breaded and fried fish, this fish is grilled, Mediterranean style. You may substitute swordfish, halibut, sea bass or any other whitefish, and the calorie values are similar.



By Mayo Clinic staff

Serves 4

Ingredients

- 4 tablespoons chopped fresh basil
- 1 tablespoon chopped fresh parsley

- 1 tablespoon minced garlic
- 2 tablespoons lemon juice
- 4 salmon fillets, each 5 ounces
- Cracked black pepper, to taste
- 4 green olives, chopped
- 4 thin slices lemon

Directions

Prepare a hot fire in a charcoal grill or heat a gas grill or broiler. Away from the heat source, lightly coat the grill rack or broiler pan with cooking spray. Position the cooking rack 4 to 6 inches from the heat source. In a small bowl, combine the basil, parsley, minced garlic and lemon juice. Spray the fish with cooking spray. Sprinkle with black pepper. Top each fillet with equal amounts of the basil-garlic mixture. Place the fish herb-side down on the grill. Grill over high heat. When the edges turn white, after about 3 to 4 minutes, turn the fish over and place on aluminum foil. Move the fish to a cooler part of the grill or reduce the heat. Grill until the fish is opaque throughout when tested with the tip of a knife and an instant-read thermometer inserted into the thickest part of the fish reads 145 F (about 4 minutes longer). Remove the salmon and place on warmed plates. Garnish with green olives and lemon slices.

Nutritional Analysis - (per serving)

Serving Size - 1 Filet

Calories 183, Cholesterol 78mg, Protein 28g, Sodium 105mg, Carbohydrate 2g, Fiber trace, Total Fat 9g, Potassium 736 mg, Saturated Fat 1.5g, Calcium 31mg, Monounsaturated Fat 3g