

# Beat the winter blues



## Your winter wellbeing guide Winter health and SAD



### Your healthy best, all year round

Adapting to the changing seasons is tough at the best of times. Dark nights and falling temperatures can make us feel lethargic, and the festive season may add extra stress to our busy lives.

For many, the coronavirus pandemic will make this year especially challenging. Health scares, lack of social interaction and financial worries all amplify feelings of anxiety. When life is filled with uncertainty, it's important to take charge of the things you can control.

This series of quick read guides will share our favourite tips and resources to boost your winter wellbeing. So if you've got the winter blues, we're here to help you get back to your healthy best.



### Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD)

If you feel the seasons have a noticeable impact on your mood, you may be experiencing the symptoms of Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD). This type of depression gets worse at certain times of the year. The condition affects millions of people in the UK.

While it's normal to feel low sometimes, people who suffer from SAD will feel persistently low during certain months of the year.

#### Symptoms to look out for:

- Persistent low mood
- Tiredness and low energy
- Lack of motivation
- Irritability
- Changes in appetite

If you think you're suffering from SAD, the tips in this guide may help to get you back on track, but it's important to speak to a doctor if your symptoms become unmanageable.



SAD  
affects some  
people in  
the summer  
too



## Sleep away the stress

Our bodies use sunlight to regulate sleep and maintain a regular body clock. One in three people suffer from poor sleep, which can lead to low mood, irritability and long term health conditions if left unchecked.

It can be difficult to keep a regular sleeping pattern in the winter months, but small changes can have a big impact on your mental health.



## Routine building tips

- 1. Get sun exposure when you can**  
Can you take a lunch break stroll, or position your workspace near a bright window?
- 2. Eat at regular times**  
Your body clock takes cues from your digestive system, so try not to skip meals.
- 3. Create your night-time ritual**  
As you wind down, avoid blue light from screens and switch off from social media.
- 4. Wake up naturally**  
If you're a morning alarm snoozer, try a lamp that simulates sunlight for a more gentle wake up.
- 5. Stick at it**  
It's easier to stick to an established routine, so be consistent to help your body adapt.



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## The importance of connection

For many of us, winter is a time for cosy nights at home on the sofa. But when everyone is hibernating, it's easy to feel distanced from our usual support structures. COVID-19 has made social isolation familiar to us all, so taking the time to reconnect can provide a major wellbeing boost.



47%  
of adults  
report feeling  
lonely at  
times

While it's difficult to be separated from our loved ones, community can be found in many places. Try joining an online class, connecting more closely with colleagues or volunteering as a telephone befriender.

Scheduling a virtual catch up can give you something to look forward to and add some structure to your week. Or wrap up warm and take a walk to reconnect with nature and clear your mind.



## Who should take vitamin D?

Vitamin D keeps our bones and muscles healthy and helps to regulate mood. Our bodies create it from food and sunlight, but it can be difficult to get enough during winter months. Vitamin D rich foods include oily fish, red meat, egg yolks and some breakfast cereals.

Winter sun doesn't contain enough UVB rays to make vitamin D, so the NHS now recommends taking a supplement to help. The tablets are easy to find in most pharmacies and supermarkets. Between 10 and 25 micrograms a day is enough for most people. Don't exceed this dosage unless advised by a medical professional.



## When to see a doctor

It's important to see your GP if your symptoms are affecting your day to day life. If you're experiencing persistent low mood, lack of energy or are struggling to get out of bed in the morning, it's worth booking an appointment.



## Coping at Christmas

### Remember the basics

Make sure your home is kept warm. 18°C is recommended as the minimum healthy temperature. As usual, keep an eye on your diet and alcohol intake, but don't be too hard on yourself – we all need a treat sometimes.

### Nurture your festive spirit

If you're missing the usual parties and pantos, find your festive fix elsewhere. Take in the fairy lights on a neighbourhood stroll, plan a cosy movie night or start a Christmas craft project. Research by [BBC Arts](#) found that creative activities help to regulate our emotions.

### Make flexible plans

Sadly lockdowns and restrictions are a part of life for the time being, so your schedule may have to go with the flow. Plan a few days at a time, or schedule online activities as a back up.

### Reach out

High expectations can add stress to an already difficult time. If you're struggling with your relationships, finances, physical or mental health, make sure you find support.

## Next time: Coping with stress

Tips to look after your mental health at work and at home

### Useful links

[NHS winter health advice](#)

[Mind.org.uk – About SAD](#)

[Age UK – Keeping well this winter](#)

[The Sleep Council – Sleep advice](#)

[Westfield Health COVID-19 resource centre](#)

### Support and advice

Westfield Health Counselling and Advice Line  
Available to health cash plan customers 24 hours a day on 0800 092 0987.

#### DoctorLine™

If you're struggling to reach your GP, our 24/7 DoctorLine™ is included in all health cash plans.

#### Webinars

On topics including winter wellbeing, healthy eating and immunity. [Get in touch](#) for details.