

Beat the winter blues



Your winter wellbeing guide Physical health in winter



Keeping your body at its best

For many of us, winter means cosy nights, Christmas parties and delicious food. But with COVID-19 still impacting our daily lives, this year will look quite different.

Worrying about the pandemic and supporting loved ones can add extra stress, making it difficult to prioritise our own health. With indoor exercise options limited and the cold setting in, keeping fit is an even bigger challenge.

But a few small changes can get you back on track for a healthy winter, so let us share our top tips to improve your physical health and keep your body as its best.



The mind-body connection

While we often associate stress with mental health, it can have troubling physical effects too. Symptoms include headaches, muscle tension, stomach problems and increased heart rate. These warning signs should be taken seriously, as your body is telling you to slow down before you burnout.

In the same way, the mind can take cues from the body. To calm yourself in a stressful moment, try these simple exercises to 'fake it 'til you make it'. They can be done anywhere and help our bodies to communicate to our minds that we're safe, letting us relax.

Half smile

Even if you don't feel like smiling, this subtle expression can help perk you up. Relax your forehead and turn the corners of your mouth up slightly – no need to crack a full smile. Try it for a few minutes at a time to boost your mood.

Willing hands

Open up your posture by relaxing your hands and turning them to welcome the world. If seated, place your open palms facing up on your lap, or if standing turn your palms towards the front. This pose signals to your body that you are not under threat, giving you permission to relax your mind as well.

Stress can
trigger our
fight or flight
response in
daily life





De-stress your space

While you might not be ready to master feng shui, it's worth thinking about how your surroundings affect your wellbeing. Reorganising your space can clear your head and make it more ergonomic, helping to keep aches and pains at bay.

Create an environment that works for you, and keep it clear of clutter to give yourself a sense of control in stressful times. A properly organised workspace will increase your motivation and keep you comfortable throughout the day.

When working from home, it's important to create separate areas for work and relaxation. If you're struggling with blurred boundaries, a simple after-work ritual can help you switch off at the end of the day. Try lighting some candles, changing your clothes or heading out for a short walk.



Fuel your body with winter nutrition

It's normal to notice an appetite change in winter, especially if you're feeling stressed. As sugary treats fill the supermarket shelves – and our stockings – it's tempting to fill up on unhealthy snacks. Try to choose more balanced alternatives, but don't stress about treating yourself every now and then.

These simple solutions can help keep you healthy without sacrificing your festive favourites:

- For cost-efficient meals packed with nutrients, try incorporating seasonal fruit and veg such as carrots, apples, cabbage and (of course) Brussels sprouts
- Get a vitamin D boost by adding oily fish, red meat, egg yolks and fortified foods to your shopping list
- Try cinnamon-roasted nuts with a comforting herbal tea for a cosy Christmas snack that keeps you feeling full
- Choose dark instead of milk chocolate to bag yourself more antioxidants with less sugar and fat
- If you drink alcohol, try a diet mixer or tonic water to reduce the calories in your tipple
- If you're struggling to resist the festive treats, let your friends and family know so they can switch out the selection boxes for more appropriate gifts
- Check out this [BBC Good Food](#) guide for recipe ideas that'll keep you healthy over Christmas



The average Brit eats over **5000** calories on Christmas Day

A 30
minute
walk burns
150
calories on
average



Winter exercise tips

The NHS recommends 150 minutes of moderate intensity exercise each week, but in the winter months it can be tempting to curl up on the sofa instead. Heading outside can be unappealing when it's cold, and the dark nights might make you feel less safe. And with social distancing guidelines in place, it can be even harder to find an activity that suits you.

With a bit of creativity, you can adapt your routine to build exercise into your lifestyle. Remember brisk walking, cycling and dancing all count, so think about simple ways you can add more movement throughout your day.

Try breaking up your work day with short breaks to stretch or go for a walk. Incorporating [5-minute workouts](#) into your day will get you well on your way to the target. If you need a bit more structure, your local gym might offer online exercise classes you can join.



Stress-busting yoga

A short yoga practice can melt away the stress. Try these simple poses to help you reconnect with your body. Hold each pose for 30 seconds before taking a rest, then repeat three times. Remember to focus on your breathing as you stretch.



Easy pose

Gently cross your legs and place your hands on your knees. Sit up straight but relaxed. Breathe deeply.



Child's pose

Kneel down and fold forward at the hips. Let your head relax. Stretch your arms in front or keep them at your sides.



Forward fold

Bend from the hips and let your neck relax. Don't worry if you can't touch the floor – let gravity do the work.



Triangle pose

Keep your front leg straight and open your chest. Rest your bottom hand on your leg, wherever is comfortable.

Useful links

[NHS exercise guidance](#)

[NHS eat well](#)

[BBC Good Food healthy Christmas recipes](#)

[Our guide to working from home](#)

[All-weather outdoor exercise tips](#)

[YouTube yoga at home playlist](#)

[Energy boosters for you and your team](#)

Support and advice

Westfield Health Counselling and Advice Line

Available to health cash plan customers 24 hours a day on 0800 092 0987.

Webinars

Our [wellbeing webinars](#) include advice on starting an exercise programme and healthy eating.

Next time: Self-care and resilience

Tips to help you start the new year at your healthy best