

Ask an Expert – Five Tips to Help Beat the Winter Blues

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As winter drags on into spring this year, seasonal affective disorder (SAD) is becoming a challenge for many. SAD is a type of depression that occurs primarily during winter and is caused by various factors, including decreased exposure to sunlight and altitude. The higher the altitude where you live, the more likely it is that you could experience mood shifts and SAD.

Symptoms of SAD can include weight gain, increased appetite, carbohydrate cravings, excessive sleep, decreased interest in activities, and low energy levels during the day.

The good news is there are things you can do to combat SAD. Consider these tips.

* Exercise outdoors. Regular physical exercise can reduce depressive symptoms by up to 50%. And if you exercise outside, the exposure to natural sunlight can increase the benefits. Dress warmly and get outside as often as possible for your daily exercise routine. If you can't, exercise in a room with as much natural light as possible.

Outdoor activities to consider include: snowshoeing, skiing, snowboarding, trail hiking, neighborhood walks, ice skating, sledding, shoveling snow for a neighbor, building snowmen or igloos, ice fishing, bird watching, or hunting.

* Reframe negative thoughts. Our thoughts influence how we feel. Identify and question negative thoughts, focusing

on disproving them or considering what advice you'd give to a friend experiencing similar thoughts.

* Practice gratitude. Focusing on gratitude can improve overall happiness and help stave off depressive symptoms by shifting the brain's focus toward positive experiences. [Click here](#) to read how gratitude can actually change the brain.

* Strengthen connections with loved ones. Our level of connection to friends and family influences our mental well-being. Create positive experiences and atmospheres with friends and family through phone calls, playdates, walks, hugs, or sharing daily highs and lows.

* Prioritize self-care. Be aware of your personal needs for optimal well-being, and take action to meet those needs. Remember, self-care is crucial for maintaining mental and emotional health. If you don't take care of yourself, who will?

[Click here](#) to see references and links.

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