

HOW TO BEAT THE WINTER BLUES

*A Fluff-Free Guide® by
The Wellness Society*



WHAT CAUSES THE WINTER BLUES?

It's very common to experience poor mental wellbeing during winter.

During the winter months, we're more likely to:

- » Feel low
- » Lack energy and/or motivation
- » Have problems with sleeping
- » Experience food cravings and/or over-eating
- » Find it difficult to concentrate
- » Experience an elevated stress response

The exact reason why this happens is unclear. However, there are a few theories, including:

- » **Being light-dependent.** Light transmits messages via our eyes to an area in our brain called the suprachiasmatic nucleus (SCN), a group of cells in the hypothalamus. This area acts as our internal body clock, controlling sleep, mood, appetite, sex drive, temperature and activity. Some people need higher levels of light than others. If we're particularly light-dependent, lack of sunlight can reduce these signals and lead to the difficulties listed above.
- » **Low serotonin levels.** Serotonin is the neurotransmitter that our regulates mood. It's thought that people prone to mental unwellness could have lower natural levels of serotonin. This then becomes particularly pronounced in winter, because reduced sunlight can cause a drop in serotonin.
- » **Low vitamin D levels.** Vitamin D plays a role in serotonin activity, so vitamin D deficiency may also contribute to poor mental wellbeing in winter.

8 WAYS TO BEAT THE WINTER BLUES NATURALLY

1. Light Therapy

"The clear treatment of choice for seasonal affective disorder is bright light therapy. It's now been evaluated in over seventy research studies, and often yields even better results for patients than medication (with far fewer side effects). [...] Remember, we were all designed to get bright light on a regular basis. That's why it has such widespread beneficial effects: boosting mood, turning down the brain's stress response, keeping the body clock in sync, and even making us more likely to socialize." – Dr Steve Irladi

"I up my meditation and yoga practice in the winter. I also bought a "happy" lamp and I think it's helping."

"I just remind myself it's temporary and the more days that pass, the quicker it is to being over [...] I have one of those lamps as well, it really does make a big difference and helps me stick to a routine!"

If you experience the above symptoms starting around autumn and continuing into winter, you might be light-dependent.

The good news is there are lots of ways you can help yourself feel better naturally. Our top recommendation is the artificial “sunbox” lights, which have special fluorescent tubes that mimic the sun’s beneficial rays.

As Dr Steve Irladi explains in his book [The Depression Cure](#), the therapeutic effects of bright light can kick in pretty quickly – some people feel their mood lift in less than a week!

We recommend the [Lumie Vitamin L](#), a certified medical device. It’s important to find a medically certified device because it ensures the device has an intensity of at least 10,000 lux. Most people need to use their lightbox for fifteen to thirty minutes each morning to feel the effects.



Centre the light box in front of you, but don't stare directly at it. Ensure you're looking at something else in front of you, such as a computer or book.

You may experience mild eye irritation, headache, or mild nausea during the first few times you use a light box. These symptoms usually clear up fairly quickly as your eyes get used to the device. If these symptoms become too uncomfortable, it's advised to reduce the amount of time you use the device and gradually build back up.

IMPORTANT: Light therapy is not suitable for people with serious eye conditions such as macular degeneration, retinopathy, or retinitis pigmentosa. You should avoid light therapy if you experience extreme light sensitivity. Individuals diagnosed with bipolar disorder should only start light therapy under a clinician's direct supervision, as bright light can sometimes trigger an episode of mania in vulnerable individuals. You should also consult with your doctor if you have a seizure disorder, as there's a very small risk that light therapy could trigger a seizure.

2. Natural Remedies

“Vitamin D drops! I think there are a lot of good brands - the drops absorb better in general. I like mine in coconut oil and add it to coffee or tea, the ones in olive oil taste too strong. Just preference though!”

“I also use Vitamin D3. I use the Garden Of Life brand vanilla spray. It tastes great and I trust the integrity of the brand.”

“I find comfort in sleep supplements tooooo, ones with magnesium, melatonin and/or 5htp.”

Popular choices for natural remedies to beat the winter blues include:

» [5-HTP](#), a building block or precursor to serotonin.

- » [Vitamin D spray, drops or tablets](#), which helps encourage serotonin production.
- » [St John's wort](#) (a.k.a. Hypericum perforatum), a herbal remedy believed to have antidepressant qualities.
- » [Magnesium](#), a natural muscle relaxer thought to help improve sleep and reduce anxiety.
- » [Lavender essential oil](#) – we love the [Deep Pillow Spray by This Works!](#)



Much of the information available regarding supplements is anecdotal rather than being strongly supported by research.

A noteworthy study is a 2008 systematic review that found St. John's wort appears to have similar efficacy to standard antidepressants with few side effects.

IMPORTANT: If you use light therapy or take anti-depressants, it's important to consult with your doctor before beginning supplements.

3. Exercise

“Walks in nature as often as possible - a change of scenery, exercise and sun sunlight can do a whole lot of good for both the body and mind!”

“[What helps me is] going for long walks in the cold. I'm serious, it works. Something about the cold still air brings a temporary sense of peace and calm. Better if done at night when no one else is on the streets. You can better focus on the feelings of your mind and body.”

“When it's a day the sun is out, be outside AS MUCH AS YOU CAN. Getting bright light, especially natural light, makes me feel a little bit of relief. It's soothing and the world seems to have so much more color.”

Studies show that brisk walking for half an hour three times a week is enough to produce anti-depressant qualities.

As Hippocrates wisely said, “Walking is man's best medicine.” We now know that exercise changes the brain—it increases the activity of serotonin and stimulates the release of “brain derived neurotrophic factors (BDNF)”, which help reverse the brain circuitries involved in low mood.

Whilst you may not feel like exercising, it's worth keeping the plethora of benefits in mind:

- ✓ Boosts mood
- ✓ Reduced stress hormones
- ✓ More energy
- ✓ Helps clear the mind
- ✓ Improves memory and concentration
- ✓ Better sleep
- ✓ Aids digestion
- ✓ Protection from chronic illness

If you're in the UK, you could join [Ramblers](#), Britain's largest walking charity. For people outside the UK, [The International Federation of Popular Sports \(IVV\)](#) is the largest walking club organisation in the world with thousands of clubs across the globe.

4. Healthy Carb Swaps

Winter carb-cravings can be explained by the fact that carbs release serotonin.

You can use this to your advantage by minimising simple carbs and increasing healthier complex carbs such as root vegetables, potatoes, fruit, and non-wheat grains such as rice and oatmeal.

As Dr Steve Irlardi explains in [The Depression Cure](#):

"Many researchers now believe sugar craving represents an attempt to "self-medicate," since surging blood glucose can trigger more serotonin activity in the brain, temporarily lifting mood. But there's a big downside: eating sugar (and other simple carbs) promotes inflammation [...] Chronic inflammation is a major culprit in promoting depression. So, the sugar-based self-medication strategy ultimately fails—in a big way."

Why not reflect on the ways you could make healthier food choices in a journal? Practise being kind to yourself when it comes to cravings and overeating—many people struggle with this!

Resources to Help You with Healthy Carb Swaps

- [A subscription to Graze](#) – we love how Graze boxes help us make healthy snack choices and also control our portion sizes. Enter the special discount code **"3FREEBX"** to get your 1st, 5th and 10th box free!
- [A List of Healthy Carb Recipes](#) from Mayo Clinic

5. Stress Prevention Strategies

Have you considered the ways you can plan ahead to reduce the amount of stress you experience? For example, you could begin preparing for the winter in summer and autumn by stocking up on Christmas presents, decorations and Christmas cards. Or why not make some savings by shopping in the January sales?

You could also try planning events such as changing jobs or moving home for summer where possible.

6. Thermotherapy

We're all familiar with the relaxation that a long, warm bath can bring. Research suggests increasing our body temperature can actually help regulate mood and anxiety. There's nothing cosier than thermotherapy in the winter months!

Our Recommended Thermotherapy Products

- » [Dreampad Intelliheat Heat Pad](#)
- » [Beurer FW20 Cosy Footwarmer](#)
- » [Shiatsu Neck and Shoulder Massager](#)

7. Staying Social

It's important to practice noticing and overriding your urges to withdraw when you're feeling low. Isolating ourselves often leads to a downward spiral. This can be difficult, especially if you're an introvert. But the science is clear – social connection is one of the most reliable mood boosters around.

Interestingly, research has shown that light therapy creates an upward spiral – it makes us more likely to seek out social contact, and more likely to find it rewarding.

Why not host a cosy, wintery dinner party? Or invite some friends over for board games?

8. Reframing Winter

Have you ever reflected on the language you use around winter?

Reframing negative thoughts can sometimes help you feel better.

Why not practice reframing winter as a time to embrace hygge (pronounced "hoo-gah"), a Norwegian concept loosely translated as "coziness"? Winter can be the best time to curl up on the sofa with a hot drink and blanket.

Winter can also be viewed as a kind of renewal period – a time to declutter, organise and create a more calming space.

"I know Hygge is trending right now but it has really helped me get through the last few winters. Lots of candles, cozy blankets, fires, board games with friends, hot tea, hot chocolate, sun lamp etc."

"I find seeking beauty from the nature somewhat helpful. Cloudless nights, colorful sunsets and the light reflecting from the ice. Everything looks so peaceful when you look at it from the right angle. And another, easier way to feel better is to put on some soft lights (or candles) and just curl into a blanket."

"But sometimes you just have to let the melancholia get to you. Brood the things that weigh you down and process them. Snapping out of that temporary melancholy is important though. It's too easy to stay on that dark mindset when the world around us is cold and dark."

Above all, it's important to allow yourself to feel your feelings, and remind yourself that low moods will eventually pass.

Check out the appendix for a free hygge definition printable!



SUMMARY: 8 WAYS TO BEAT THE WINTER BLUES NATURALLY

1. **Light therapy.** Use an artificial sunbox such as the [Lumie Vitamin L](#) device.
2. **Natural remedies.** Experiment with natural remedies such as [5-HTP](#), [Vitamin D spray, drops](#) or [tablets](#), [St John's wort](#), [magnesium](#) and [lavender essential oil](#).
3. **Exercise.** Regular exercise is one of the most powerful ways to boost mental wellbeing. Keep in mind all the amazing benefits!
4. **Healthy carb swaps.** Get a serotonin boost through healthy carbs – enjoy root vegetables, potatoes, fruit, and non-wheat grains such as rice and oatmeal.
5. **Stress prevention strategies.** Prevention methods such as stocking up on Christmas supplies earlier in the year can help you reduce mental distress in winter.
6. **Thermotherapy.** Get a regular dose of thermotherapy – a super cosy way to help regulate your mood and anxiety in winter.
7. **Staying social.** Don't neglect your social needs – try your best to notice and override urges to withdraw. Good quality social connection is one of the most reliable mood boosters!
8. **Reframing winter.** Watch the language you use around winter. Could you reframe it as a time to embrace hygge? As a time for renewal? Or perhaps it would help to focus more on the beauty of winter?

Thank You to Our Collaborators

A huge thank you to everyone who shared their experiences and insights for this tool!

This massively helps us improve the quality of our content and we greatly appreciate your collaboration.

APPENDIX

hy · gge

[hue-gah] (n.)

a quality of cosiness and taking pleasure from the presence of gentle, soothing things; the ritual of celebrating the everyday; the creation of wellbeing, connection and warmth.