

Your Employee Assistance Program is a support service that can help you take the first step toward change.

Beating the Winter Blues

As the days grow shorter and the temperature colder, you and your family may be tempted to make like squirrels and hibernate in your cozy, centrally-heated home. But, if you're like the estimated 15 per cent to 20 per cent of people who experience the weight gain, carbohydrate cravings and lethargy of the "winter blues," resist the urge to burrow under the covers. Instead:

Brave the outdoors. Bundle up and go for a walk outside, especially on sunny days. Winter blues are caused by the body's response to reduced light exposure, so every ray helps lift your spirits. Take a stroll during your lunch hour, walk your kids to school, or go to the corner store on foot—just get out there!

Limit starchy, fatty and sweet foods. Those "comfort foods" that are supposed to help you feel "safe and warm"—cookies, mashed potatoes, etc.—could actually be dragging your mood down and pushing your weight up. Reach for fresh fruit and vegetables instead of those french fries. It'll help you feel lighter in more ways than one.

Get involved. Sign yourself up for a new class or activity. Not only will it get you out of the house, it'll encourage you to discover new interests and avoid isolation.

Get help. If your symptoms are greatly limiting your ability to function at home and at work then you may be suffering from a seasonal form of clinical depression known as **Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD).** SAD's symptoms are more severe than "winter blues" and may also include: irritability, feelings of "emptiness" or profound sadness, and major changes in eating and sleeping routines. If you think you might be experiencing SAD, consult your physician or a professional for support.

Get moving! Whether you jump on a stationary bike, unwind with yoga or dance the night away, physical activity fights off weight gain, boosts energy and releases mood-enhancing endorphins. Kill three birds with one stone: increase your sun exposure, get active and spend more time with the kids by embracing outdoor winter activities. Lace up your old skates, strap on some skis, or dust off that toboggan and spend a fun-filled family day in the park.

Create winter rituals. Find new ways to celebrate the frosty season: organize winter activities that friends and family can enjoy together. Arrange a sleigh ride, neighborhood winter festival, skating party, etc. All are great ways to get everyone out, socializing and re-energized during winter's darkest months.

By using your down time during the winter months to catch up with friends and discover new hobbies, you can shift your mood and restore your energy levels. However, if you are experiencing the blues for long periods of time or notice changes in your appetite or sleep patterns, consult your doctor immediately for support.
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