

Beat the September SLUMP

Here's why you're feeling flat – and how to snap out of it

After the lightness and freedom of summer, September can feel like a slog. The holidays are over, the days grow shorter, routines tighten up and many of us find ourselves feeling low, overwhelmed or simply lacking the spark to get going again.

But this seasonal dip, often called the September slump, isn't just in your head. According to rapid transformational therapist and mindset coach Elise Clayton, it's a very real response to abrupt shifts in pace, structure and expectations – especially if you were already running on empty before the summer break.

So what causes it, and what can we do to feel more grounded, calm and motivated? Elise explains what's going on in your brain and body, and shares simple, soothing ways to move through it with compassion and ease.

Why it happens

'After the highs of summer – longer days, lighter routines, maybe even a break from responsibilities – September can feel like emotional whiplash,' says Elise. 'Suddenly, we are thrown back into structure,



expectations and busyness.'

Your nervous system doesn't thrive on sudden change. It prefers steady transitions, but autumn rarely offers that.

'When we go from ease to pressure, it can stir up old stress responses. That's especially true if you never truly rested in the first place,' Elise adds.

You might have spent summer multitasking childcare, squeezing in rest between work and travel, or simply trying to keep up with it all. So by the time September rolls around, your emotional reserves are already depleted.

What it causes

This shift doesn't just affect your diary – it can impact your whole system.

'We go from sunlight and expansion to darker mornings, colder air and the mental load of schedules again. There's a real contrast

effect,' says Elise.

You might feel more tired or foggy, physically heavy or inexplicably low.

'For many people, it subconsciously triggers stress habits, especially if routine is linked to pressure, perfectionism or people-pleasing,' she explains. 'It's not laziness – it's emotional residue asking to be released.'

This can show up in snappy moods, a sudden lack of motivation, or struggling to make even small decisions.

'We blame ourselves, but really, our nervous system is just trying to keep up,' says Elise.

Start with self-talk

You don't need to overhaul your whole life to feel better.

'The first step is permission – letting yourself feel off without judgment,' says Elise. 'There's nothing wrong with you.'

Try spending just five

minutes each day regulating your nervous system – walking without your phone, journaling your thoughts, or doing some slow breathing. These small resets are surprisingly powerful.

'Each morning, ask yourself – what do I need today to feel steady? That one question reconnects you to your own rhythm, instead of chasing outside demands,' she adds.

Elise also recommends a



mirror practice.

'Look into your own eyes and say, "You're doing better than you think." That small act of self-recognition is deeply regulating. From that place, motivation starts to return organically – not from pressure, but from safety.'

Routines that help

Even tiny actions help you build momentum again.

'When energy is low, even basic tasks can feel like mountains,' Elise says. 'So ditch the big goals and focus on micro-movements.'

Start small – drink a glass of water, put on clean clothes, answer one message.

'Progress doesn't have to be punishing to count.'

She also suggests creating a soft-start ritual to ease into the day.

'Light a candle, use a grounding scent, or play calming music. Engage your senses in a way that makes your body feel safe. It's a signal that it's OK to begin again.'

Be kind to yourself

When you're feeling flat, the inner critic often pipes up. But kindness works better than self-discipline.

Elise says, 'Try saying in the mirror, "It's OK to feel like this, I love you." Those words may seem small, but they soothe and rewire your subconscious far more than you realise.'

This isn't about pushing through or snapping out of it overnight. It's about landing gently and letting your energy return from a place of safety, not stress.

'Your body isn't broken,' Elise adds. 'It's adjusting. And the more gently you treat yourself, the faster your spark comes back.'

● *Elise Clayton is a rapid transformational therapist (RTT), writer and advocate for nervous system healing and emotional resilience. Find out more at makeupyourmindset.net*

Our Health SOS

When my son recovered from a sickness bug, something changed and I was determined to get to the bottom of it

'HE'S HIDING HIS FOOD'



From Jodie Morris, 32, of Wales

Tucking my son Jae up in bed, I gave him a sympathetic look.

'Oh bless, love,' I said. 'You're so poorly.'

He'd been sent home from school with a sickness bug, and over the next few days, he struggled to keep anything down.

Jae was in bed for a week with it, but thankfully after that he recovered and was able to return to school.

But one day, his teacher called and said, 'Jae isn't eating his lunch. It looks like he's hiding his food.'

'That's not like him at all,' I replied, shocked.

Jae usually loved his grub. I wondered if it was still the bug he'd had affecting him.

'Love, I've noticed you're not eating,' I gently asked one day. 'Is everything OK?'

'I've just gone off my food,' he replied.

The school tried letting him eat his lunch in the classroom, rather than the dining hall, to see if that helped. But it didn't make a difference and his eating habits deteriorated as he lost all interest in food.

Worried he'd start losing weight, I began giving Jae supplement drinks.

As time went on, it started to affect his social life too. He didn't want to go to friends' houses for tea and he'd refuse to eat at parties.

Worried, I took Jae to the

doctor, who referred him to child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS).

After being assessed, he was referred for anxiety intervention and seen by paediatric dieticians. But we were told they didn't have the specialist knowledge to deal with eating issues related to trauma. He began struggling to go to school too and fell behind.

'I'm going to take you to a private dietician,' I said.

At the clinic, she assessed him and sent her notes to CAMHS, and the eating disorder team at our local hospital saw him right away.

Days later, a doctor called and told me Jae had avoidant or restrictive food intake disorder (ARFID), which they thought stemmed from

the trauma of the sickness bug. It was a huge relief that he finally had a diagnosis, and now he's being seen by mental health and eating disorder experts to help him overcome this.

Jae's diet is still very limited, so he still relies on supplement drinks for nutrients. He doesn't like being around food either, so I can't take him to the supermarket.

He's become very isolated, so right now we're trying to focus on calming his anxiety, so he can redevelop a healthy relationship with food again. It will take time, but I know he'll get there.

For now, I'm determined to raise awareness around ARFID so other parents aren't left in the dark.

Avoidant or restrictive food intake disorder (ARFID)

● **What is it?** An eating disorder characterised by avoiding certain foods or types of food, having restricted overall intake, or both. Possible reasons include negative feelings over the smell, taste or texture of certain foods or a traumatic past experience with food, such as choking or being sick after eating.

● **What are the symptoms?** Sensitivity to some types of food, only eating a

limited range of food, avoiding social situations where food is present, finding eating a chore, becoming anxious at mealtimes.

● **What is the treatment?** Cognitive behavioural therapy, behavioural interventions like exposure work and anxiety management training.

● **Where can I find out more?** For more information, visit beateatingdisorders.org.uk