

As the days get shorter and the temperature plummets, your mood can nosedive alongside it. There is now sound scientific evidence showing that a change in season can drastically affect your mood. “Winter blues”, known medically as Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD), is thought to be caused by the body producing more melatonin in response to the shorter daylight hours in winter, causing lethargy and symptoms of depression.

Fewer hours spent in the sun can decrease your vitamin D levels as well. You should get 90% of your daily vitamin D from sunlight. One of its most important roles is keeping your immune system strong, so a lack of vitamin D can result in you getting sick more often — that may be why that pesky cold keeps coming back! Not getting enough vitamin D can also result in fatigue, bone and back pain, and depression.

The winter blues can result in low energy, weight gain, anxiety, loss of interest in social activities, increased appetite and extreme carb cravings... and here I was thinking there’s no such thing as too much pasta.

So when the sun is going down far too early and your nose keeps on running while you can’t bring your feet to do the same, what can you do to beat the winter blues?

Do as the Danish do

Happiness researchers (a real job!) consistently rate Denmark as having the happiest people on Earth, which can be attributed to a concept called “hygge”. The Danes embrace winter

by getting cozy at home — creating a warm atmosphere and enjoying the good things in life with good people. Light up those scented candles and invite some close friends over.

Make it a real winter

Treat yourself to a proper winter: buy some fake snow and sprinkle it around, take a group of friends and go ice skating, or host a Christmas in July party. Add a Secret Santa and you’ve just successfully scammed yourself into getting (and giving) a gift.

Eat yourself happier

Those excessive carbohydrate cravings can be so good to give in to, but don’t forget to incorporate fruit and veg into your daily diet. Add some ginger to your morning smoothie for a little extra kick that will also help combat colds and flus.

Pick a hobby

Go full winter hobby and take up knitting — purposeful activities like needlework focus your mind and improve your wellbeing. Craft coaxes the reward centre in your brain into releasing dopamine, a chemical that activates happiness.

Meditate on it

Meditation is shown to increase immune function and positive emotion while decreasing anxiety. It’s also shown to improve your ability to multitask and your memory. Practise as little as 10 minutes in the morning and 10 minutes at night to help beat the winter blues.

Light therapy

Embraced in the northern hemisphere where the winters can be particularly dark and difficult, most people notice an improvement in their SAD symptoms within a week of using light therapy. Buy a light box that emits 10,000 lux and sit in front of it for 30 minutes a day — it will reduce the secretion of melatonin in the brain to make you happier and more awake.

Dawn lights

A dawn simulator is an alarm clock that wakes you up gradually with light, mimicking a natural sunrise. It helps improve your circadian rhythm and puts you on an appropriate and healthy sleep cycle.

Getting active

Sometimes the hardest thing to do when you’re feeling down is exercise. Make yourself accountable and join a social sports team or start a walking group with friends, so you have a support network and an opportunity to produce endorphins in one go. Even going for a stroll on your lunch break will have some benefit, especially if you get in some daylight as well.

Vitamin D

That weak winter sunshine just might not be enough to get your daily sunlight vitamins. Vitamin D supplements will help make up for the sun you’re missing and help alleviate the symptoms of winter blues.

It’s perfectly natural to experience the winter blues — it really is just an inferior season compared to the other three. Exercise, a good diet and good social interaction can help alleviate the blues, and there’s absolutely no shame in reaching out to a medical health professional if you feel like you can’t shake the symptoms. **fw**

Beat the WINTER BLUES

SHORT DAYS AND COLD WEATHER GETTING YOU DOWN? THIS AUSSIE EXPAT SURVIVING IN LONDON HAS SOME TIPS TO GET YOUR WINTER GROOVE ON.

■ KATE EVANS