

Beat the winter blues

Your winter wellbeing guide Winter health and SAD



Your healthy best all year round

Adapting to the changing seasons is tough at the best of times. Dark nights and falling temperatures can make us feel lethargic, and we may feel extra stress in our already busy lives.

For many, the coronavirus pandemic makes winter especially challenging. Health scares, uncertainty and financial worries all amplify feelings of anxiety. When life is changing rapidly, it's important to take charge of the things you can control.

This quick-read guide will share our favourite tips and resources to boost your winter wellbeing. So if you've got the winter blues, we're here to help you get back to your healthy best.



Seasonal affective disorder (SAD)

If you feel the seasons have a noticeable impact on your mood, you may be experiencing the symptoms of Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD). This type of depression gets worse at certain times of the year. The condition affects millions of people in the UK.

While it's normal to feel low sometimes, people who suffer from SAD will feel consistently worse during certain months of the year.



Symptoms to look out for:

- Persistent low mood
- Tiredness and low energy
- Lack of motivation
- Irritability
- Changes in appetite

If you think you're suffering from SAD, the tips in this guide may help to get you back on track, but it's important to speak to a doctor if your symptoms become unmanageable.



Sleep away the stress

Our bodies use sunlight to regulate sleep and maintain a regular body clock. One in three people suffer from poor sleep, which can lead to low mood, irritability and long term health conditions if left unchecked.

It can be difficult to keep a regular sleeping pattern in the winter months, but a consistent night-time routine can have a big impact on your mental health.



Who should take vitamin D?

Vitamin D keeps our bones and muscles healthy and helps to regulate mood. Our bodies create it from food and sunlight, but it can be difficult to get enough during winter months. Food rich in vitamin D include oily fish, red meat, egg yolks and some breakfast cereals.

Winter sun doesn't contain enough UVB rays to make vitamin D, so the NHS now recommends that most people take a supplement to help. The tablets are easy to find in most pharmacies and supermarkets. Between 10 and 25 micrograms a day is usually enough. Don't exceed this dosage unless advised by a medical professional.



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Routine-building tips

Get sun exposure when you can

Can you take a lunch break stroll, or position your workspace near a bright window?

Eat at regular times

Your body clock takes cues from your digestive system, so try not to skip meals.

Create your night-time ritual

As you wind down, avoid blue light from screens and switch off from social media.

Wake up naturally

If you're a morning alarm snoozer, try a lamp that simulates sunlight for a more gentle wake up.

Stick at it

It's easier to stick to an established routine, so be consistent to help your body adapt.



Coping this winter

Remember the basics

Make sure your home is kept warm — 18°C is recommended as the minimum healthy temperature. As usual, keep an eye on your diet and alcohol intake, but don't be too hard on yourself — we all need a treat sometimes.

Appreciate small moments

While the pandemic may have left you feeling subdued, there's still opportunity to discover new things you enjoy. Try exploring your local neighbourhood, planning a cosy movie night or starting a new craft project. Research by BBC Arts found that creative activities help to regulate our emotions.

Reach out

Spending too much time alone can add stress to an already difficult time. If you're struggling with your relationships, finances, physical or mental health, make sure you seek support.



47% of adults report feeling lonely at times



When to see a doctor

It's important to see your GP if your symptoms are affecting your day to day life. If you're experiencing persistent low mood, lack of energy or are struggling to get out of bed in the morning, it's worth booking an appointment.

Westfield Health resources

[NHS winter health advice](#)

[Mind.org.uk – About SAD](#)

[Age UK – Keeping well this winter](#)

[The Sleep Council – Sleep advice](#)

[Westfield Health COVID-19 resource centre](#)

Support and advice

Westfield Health Counselling and Advice Line

Available to health cash plan customers 24 hours a day on 0800 092 0987.

Webinars

On topics including winter wellbeing, healthy eating and immunity. [Get in touch](#) for details.

Next guide: [Stress and mental health](#)