



WINTER MENTAL HEALTH TIPS

Dr. Bali, Easterseals MORC's Medical Director – IDD and Integrated Care, and Dr. Patel, Easterseals MORC Psychiatrist, have compiled a few tips to make sure you remain mentally healthy during the cold, winter months.

WHAT ARE THE WINTER BLUES?

The Winter Blues are described as sadness that occurs during the late fall and winter months. Some individuals experience trouble sleeping, decreased appetite, changes in mood or thinking, and an increased lack of motivation.



WHAT IS SEASONAL AFFECTIVE DISORDER (SAD)?

Seasonal Affective Disorder is described as severe sadness that occurs during the fall and winter months. Individuals who struggle with SAD have frequent sleep issues, poor appetite, changes in mood or thinking, and experience depression that limits normal functioning and motivation.



EXERCISE

Physical activity has been shown to boost mood, decrease symptoms of depression, and reduce stress. It's not uncommon to feel overwhelmed and unmotivated to exercise when feeling depressed. Instead of committing to one longer task, break the time up into chunks.

- For example, if your goal is to walk 30 minutes a day, divide the time into three 10-minute walks.

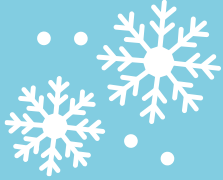
Getting outside daily, even for a few minutes, can have a huge impact on your mood and help target the specific symptoms of SAD related to lack of daylight. Even 15-minute periods of activity (e.g., jumping jacks, running in place, push-ups, & sit-ups) can have a positive impact on your physical and mental health. Spending time outdoors each day can also boost your vitamin D levels from sunlight.



NUTRITION

A simple change to boost your mood is to consider the food you eat. Consuming protein with your meals can enhance mood and prevent sugar and carb cravings later in the day.





- **Eat healthy.** Proper nutrition can improve mental health. Choose whole, nutrient dense food over processed food.
- **Stay Hydrated.** Dehydration can actually slow down your brain function. Ensure you are drinking plenty of water.
- **Take your vitamins - especially vitamin D.** Taking 5000 units of vitamin D during the dark and cold months can help to decrease the chance of hypertension, heart disease, depression, and anxiety. Spending less time exposed to the sun causes a drop in vitamin D levels. You can also combat this depletion from natural food sources like dairy, supplements, or a light therapy with a high-quality light box. Ensuring you spend time outside each day, even if it's only for a few minutes, can help increase your vitamin D levels during the winter months.
- **Avoid drugs and alcohol.** Your focus should be on being as healthy as possible.



LIMIT SCREEN TIME

Being indoors more often means an increase in screen time. And if this time is spent consuming a non-stop news cycle, you may feel an increase of winter blues. This winter, help minimize your stress and sadness from the news by trying to limit the amount of time you spend in front of a screen.

KEEP A SLEEP ROUTINE

- Go to bed and wake up at the same time every day.
- Follow a bedtime routine that signals rest, relaxation, and unwinding from your day.
- Expose yourself to light as soon as you wake up.
- Sleep in a cool, dark room.
- Refrain from using electronics in your bedroom.





MAINTAIN CONTACT

Studies have shown having a strong support system and maintaining contact with others can greatly benefit our mental health. COVID-19 changed the way we interact with friends and family, but the winter months provide a unique set of challenges when trying to socialize. To maintain contact during the colder months, try talking on the phone so you can hear your loved one's voice, setting up a video chat so you can see their face, or organizing virtual game nights!



SEEKING SUPPORT

- Seek psychotherapy or other mental health services at Easterseals MORC or another mental health provider.
- Check in with yourself by taking Easterseals MORC's free and anonymous mental health screening to see if professional support could be beneficial to you and your mental health.
 - Take a check-up from the neck up at:
<https://bit.ly/EastersealsMORCscreening>
- A FREE and downloadable resource guide is available at:
<https://bit.ly/CommunityResources25>
- If you or a loved one is experiencing a mental health crisis, call or text 988 or chat **988lifeline.org**.
 - 988 offers 24/7 access to trained crisis counselors who can help people experiencing mental health related distress. That could be:
 - Thoughts of suicide
 - Mental health or substance use crises
 - Emotional distress
 - Other mental health challenges

