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When shorter days dim your mood

How to feel better and stay balanced this winter



Winter in the city can be beautiful — twinkling lights, crisp air, cozy weekends indoors. But the shorter days and long nights can also affect your mood. If you notice this every winter, it could be **seasonal affective disorder (SAD)**.

Signs to watch for

Winter-pattern SAD is a type of depression that tends to ebb and flow with daylight. Common symptoms include:

- Craving carb-rich foods and overeating
- Not wanting to socialize
- Sleeping too much

As with other types of depression, people with SAD may:

- Feel anxious, grouchy, or sad
- Find it hard to focus or remember things
- Have headaches, pain, or stomach problems

If you recognize these symptoms, don't dismiss them as just "winter blues." There are effective ways to feel better and stay balanced — even through a long and chilly New York winter.

Here are some ways to tackle the challenges of SAD.

Challenge #1: Seasonal changes may disrupt the body's internal clock — possibly because of limited daylight during the winter.

How to fight it: Talk to your doctor for advice. They may recommend light therapy, which helps make up for the lack of natural sunshine during colder months. Even stepping outside on bright mornings for a short walk can make a difference.

Challenge #2: People who have SAD experience some of the same symptoms as other forms of depression, including low mood and trouble concentrating.

How to fight it: Focus on positive thoughts and try to distract yourself with a hobby. Visit a local library, **museum**, or community center. Many offer free events and classes.

Challenge #3: SAD can increase appetite and lead to weight gain.

How to fight it: Push yourself to be more active. Exercise can lift your mood and help you maintain a healthy weight. Too chilly outside? Try an indoor workout class through programs like **Shape Up NYC**, or rely on housework, such as vacuuming, sweeping, and climbing stairs to get your blood pumping.

Challenge #4: If you have SAD, you're likely to sleep too much and feel sluggish.

How to fight it: Spend time with friends and family, and look for ways to get involved in your community, such as volunteering at a local food pantry or neighborhood cleanup.

Think you might have SAD? Take this short **SAD quiz** to learn more.

Feeling overwhelmed?

MetroPlusHealth offers behavioral services and programs for children, teens, and adults. To learn more, click **here**. If you ever think about harming yourself or others, call **800.273.TALK (8255)** to get help right away. Support is available 24/7.

Your sick season survival guide: **Parent edition**

Once the sniffles show up at school or day care, it's open season for coughs, colds, and the flu. Suddenly, your whole household starts sniffing, coughing, and reaching for tissues.

While you can't bubble-wrap your kids, you can prepare for the sick-day chaos. Make sure to arm yourself with the basics.

Stock up on supplies

Before the germs strike, make sure your medicine cabinet isn't full of expired cough syrup. Gather these essentials at home:

- Digital thermometer
- Age-appropriate pain relievers and fever reducers
- Nasal saline (drops, spray, or mist) and bulb syringe
- Hydration helpers: electrolyte drinks, ice pops, broth
- Tissues and petroleum jelly for chapped noses

Soothe symptoms

When your child's under the weather, simple comforts can help. Offer sips of water, broth, or electrolyte drinks to keep them hydrated. Use nasal saline, a bulb syringe, or a humidifier to ease stuffy noses.

To soothe coughs and sore throats, offer honey to kids older than 12 months. For fevers, dress your child in lightweight clothes and let them rest. Try quiet activities like reading together. If they're really not feeling well, you can use medicine to help bring down the fever — just double-check the label to make sure they get the right dose.

Limit the spread (as best you can)

Once a virus hits your home, a few habits may help keep it from spreading. Have everyone wash their hands often, especially after sneezing or coughing. Carry hand sanitizer for moments when soap and water aren't an option.

Regularly clean high-touch spots like doorknobs, light switches, and handrails. Wash toys after playtime, too — germs love to linger.

Know when to get help

Some symptoms are just part of the virus package, but they'll pass in time. Others are more serious.

Call your child's pediatrician if you notice:

- Breathing much faster than normal, or wheezing
- Fever of 104 degrees or higher (or 100.4 or higher in children younger than 3 months)
- Fever that lasts five days or more
- Dark urine, dry mouth, or no tears
- No urine for eight hours
- Severe diarrhea or vomiting for more than eight hours
- **Call 911 immediately:** Face or lips turning blue during coughing



The new wellness trend: Digital detox

We check our phones an average of 205 times a day. (No, that's not a typo.)

We scroll at work, on the couch, in bed, and often without realizing we're doing it. While it might not feel like much, all that time adds up — slowly chipping away at our attention, our relationships, and even our sense of self. That's why some people add a "digital detox" to their list of New Year's resolutions — choosing to reset their screen habits and reclaim more balance in the year ahead.

Screens vs. well-being

Too much screen time can take a toll on your health and well-being. It's been linked to poor sleep, increased stress, difficulty focusing, and higher rates of depression and anxiety. Social media in particular damages self-esteem, skewing how we see ourselves and our lives.

But the benefits of stepping back are real. Taking a break, known as a digital detox, can help you:

- Sleep more soundly
- Improve productivity
- Boost your mood
- Reduce depression symptoms
- Reconnect with friends and family
- Feel more satisfied in life

It's not about throwing your phone in a drawer for a week. It's about pressing pause long enough to remember what life feels like when you're not always plugged in.



Break the tap-swipe-repeat cycle

Decide how long your digital detox will last. It might be 24 hours, a full weekend, or more.

Once you've picked your window, try these strategies to help you follow through and make the most of it:

- **Start small.** Keep your phone in another room during meals, walks, or the first and last hour of your day.
- **Create no-scroll zones.** Designate certain spaces, like your bedroom or the dinner table, as screen-free.
- **Take a timeout.** Turn off notifications for social media apps that pull you in the most. Or deactivate them altogether.
- **Replace the reflex.** When you notice yourself picking up your phone out of habit, try something else: stretch, go for a walk, or call a friend instead of scrolling past them.

Protect your baby from syphilis

Syphilis is a sexually transmitted infection. Without treatment, it can cause serious health problems. Congenital syphilis happens when a mother passes syphilis to her baby during pregnancy. Congenital syphilis is becoming more common. More babies are being born with it now than in past years. Learn how to protect yourself and your baby [here](#).

Beyond sore: When pain means something more



Ever been told “no pain, no gain?” Do you push through even when something doesn’t feel quite right?

That drive can be motivating, but knowing your limits is just as important. As you set new goals for the year, staying active can strengthen both body and mind. Here’s how to recognize normal soreness, prevent injury, and know when to get checked out.

Stay active for sore muscles

If you’ve ever tried an activity that’s new to you, you’ve probably felt sore a day or two later. Called *delayed onset muscle soreness (DOMS)*, this stiffness and aching usually starts within 24 hours of your workout and peaks within 72 hours.

The good news: Soreness is normal and a sign that your muscles are getting stronger. While it’s tempting to rest until the pain subsides, research shows it’s better to take an active approach to recovery. Here’s how to stay

active and feel better faster:

- Do some light stretching.
- Try yoga.
- Use a foam roller for about two minutes on each sore muscle.

And don’t skip your warm-up to help lessen soreness and lower your risk of injury. Begin with five to 10 minutes of light cardio, like brisk walking or jumping rope. Then, stretch the muscles you’ll be using with moves like arm circles or bodyweight squats.

Press pause on pain

Pain that starts during or right after physical activity could be a warning sign of an acute injury (think sprained ankle) or

an overuse injury (such as tennis elbow). If something feels off, stop the activity right away. Pushing through pain can make an injury worse or slow your recovery.

Minor injuries often improve with rest, ice, compression, elevation, and over-the-counter pain relievers. But, seek medical care if you notice:

- Sharp or severe pain, or extreme swelling
- Inability to put weight on the affected area
- A joint that looks deformed or out of place
- Numbness or tingling
- Pain or swelling that lingers more than a few days
- Pain that keeps coming back when you exercise

Don’t let pain slow you down

If pain is keeping you from your daily routine, MetroPlusHealth offers **Virtual Visit**. It’s an easy way to get medical advice and learn what steps to take next.

Eating smarter: How to feel full with fewer calories

Cutting calories doesn't have to mean feeling hungry or only eating salads. The key is learning how to eat *smarter*. With the right foods on your plate, you can stay satisfied and still work toward your weight goals.

The full-plate trick

If you want to feel full without overdoing it, eat for volume. That means choosing foods that fill up your plate — and your stomach — without packing in extra calories.

Look for ingredients rich in water and fiber, like fruits and vegetables. They add bulk, giving you the same amount of food with fewer calories. As an added bonus, they usually have less fat, too.

Swaps that won't leave you hungry

The next step is to replace heavy ingredients with the new, lighter ones. Here are a few ideas:

- **Bulk up sandwiches.** Pile on lettuce, tomato, cucumbers, or onions, and cut back on meat and cheese.
- **Stir in produce.** Add chopped vegetables to soup instead of noodles.
- **Rethink your sides.** At dinner, swap a cup of pasta or rice with a serving of sautéed vegetables.
- **Munch mindfully.** Choose whole fruit when you can. A cup of grapes has the same calories as a small box of raisins.
- **Fizz with flavor.** Add a squeeze of lemon or a splash of orange juice to sparkling water. Ditch the sugary sodas (or at least try to cut back).



Quick kitchen tips

Changing how you cook helps, too. If you usually fry foods, try roasting, baking, or grilling. Use citrus or salt-free herbs, spices, and seasonings to add flavor without heavy sauces. And keep canned or frozen fruits and veggies on hand for easy meal prep on busy days.

You don't have to choose between losing weight and feeling satisfied. By making smart swaps, you can enjoy meals, curb hunger, and support your health goals — all at the same time.

Need a healthy dinner idea? This hearty **Black Bean Chili** recipe is perfect for a chilly night!

Don't cut out the good stuff

Losing weight shouldn't come at the cost of your health. Your body needs key nutrients to function and keep you feeling your best. Make sure you're consistently eating a mix of fruits and veggies, whole grains, and proteins.

The sobering truth about alcohol

Having a few drinks with dinner or friends might be part of your routine, but it's easy to lose track of how much you're drinking — and how it may affect your health. Recent research suggests alcohol may have more downsides than once believed, making it smart for anyone to consider cutting back.

Take an honest tally

Are you a moderate or heavy drinker? Do you binge drink? When you total up how much you drink each week, you may be surprised at the results. Take this **short quiz** to find out.

- **Moderate drinking** is having one drink a day or fewer for women and two drinks or fewer for men.
- **Heavy drinking** is having eight or more drinks a week for women and 15 or more drinks for men.
- **Binge drinking** is having four or more drinks in one day for women and five or more drinks for men.

The downsides of drinking

Over time, heavy drinking or binge drinking can take a toll on your health. Long-term health problems linked to heavy drinking include:

- Liver disease
- Heart disease
- High blood pressure
- Some types of cancer
- Digestive problems
- Memory issues, including dementia
- Depression and anxiety
- Learning problems

Drinking also has short-term effects. We're all familiar with the dreaded hangover. But there are more serious concerns too, such as increased risk for accidents, domestic violence, sexually transmitted diseases, and alcohol poisoning.



How to lower your risk

No matter how much you drink, drinking less is always a better choice for your health. By choosing not to drink — or drinking in moderation — you're doing your body a big favor. Here are some ways to cut back:

- **Plan it out.** Decide ahead of time how many days you will drink and how many drinks you will have.
- **Count your drinks.** Don't let someone "top off" a glass of wine or mixed drink without keeping track.
- **Remove alcohol from your home.** You'll be less likely to drink it if it's not readily available.
- **Get support.** Tell friends and family that you're cutting back and encourage them to join you. If you need help with quitting, talk with your doctor.



Take care of your teeth

Your oral health is an important part of your overall health. Make sure to see your dentist every six months for a checkup and cleaning. If you need help finding a dentist, click [here](#).

The ⁷ KINDS OF Rest

YOUR BODY MAY NEED

1



Racing thoughts or trouble focusing?

You may need

Mental Rest.

Journal your thoughts or try meditating.

2



Worn out from giving to others?

You may need

Social Rest.

Step away from interactions that drain your energy.

3



Feeling stuck or uninspired?

You may need

Creative Rest.

Paint, write, or bake for fun.

4



Overwhelmed by screen time or noise?

You may need

Sensory Rest.

Unplug and sit in silence for 10 minutes.

5



Noticing tense muscles or body exhaustion?

You may need

Physical Rest.

Stretch or take a nap.

6



Struggling to find meaning or purpose?

You may need

Spiritual Rest.

Join a cause that matters to you.

7



Under pressure to “keep it together”?

You may need

Emotional Rest.

Set a boundary by saying “no” without guilt.

