

Stay in Shape, Beat the Winter Blues

With the temperature dropping and the winter season beginning this month, most of us will have trouble staying motivated to exercise and stay in shape this time of year.

The winter blues also known as seasonal affective disorder (SAD), results from lack of exposure to sunlight from short days and long nights and hibernating indoors most of the time due to the cold weather. Symptoms include feelings of depression and low energy levels, which can be improved with changes in lifestyle and nutrition. First, nutritionally be sure to eat foods high in energy as in unprocessed, organic, nutrient whole foods like fruits and vegetables, whole grains, beans and lentils. A great way to combine these foods and make them taste great in the winter is to make wholesome healthy hot soups. It has also been found that foods that increase serotonin levels in the brain will improve your mood. These include fish, turkey, chicken, cottage cheese, avocados, and bananas. Second, lifestyle, it is important to stay active throughout the winter months as well as all four seasons. There are many options to exercise and stay in shape both indoors and outdoors. Exercising outdoors does require more planning and more safety precautions than during warmer months. Some winter exercise tips to keep in mind are:

1. First and foremost is to set fitness and health goals to keep you motivated.
2. Dress in layers, start with a lightweight moisture wicking garment next to the skin, followed by an insulating layer of synthetic material or fleece that will also absorb moisture, followed by a wind resistant jacket if needed that is semi-porous to let moisture escape. As you warm up you can then remove a layer so you don't become over heated.
3. Be sure to wear light reflective gear so you are visible. With the shorter days it may be dark when you get home from work or if you exercise outdoors in the early morning.
4. Wear shoes that have good traction to prevent falls on snow or patches of ice. Be safe and don't go outside if it is too icy.
5. Stay hydrated, you will still sweat and perspire as your body warms up from exercise in the cold weather.
6. Be sure you dress so you are a little chilly when you first go outside. This will allow for the heat your body will create as you exercise.
7. It is very important to warm up properly and stretch and cool down after exercising.
8. Head into the wind for the first half of your walk or run, and come back with it the second half, this will help you avoid becoming chilled from perspiration and the wind chill factor.
9. Don't forget to cover your face, wear gloves, and a cap or hat to help your body retain heat, also a scarf if needed.
10. Time your workouts so that you get home before you get to tired, be aware of the risk of hypothermia and frostbite, plan your route so you can seek warmth if needed and let someone know your route and amount of time you will be gone.
11. Exercise with a friend to stay safe and also help with accountability and motivation.
12. Try a new outdoor activity like cross country skiing or mountain biking if the weather isn't too cold, wind chill will be more of a factor on a bike.

If you don't feel comfortable walking or running in the cold weather there are other cardiovascular exercise activities to try indoors including swimming, water walking or jogging, jumping rope, or group aerobic classes. Other tips include:

1. Join a Health Club for the winter which will open up many options to you.
2. Walk indoors; go to a mall or other indoor location. Some malls have a walking club you can join.
3. Make a workout by climbing up and down a flight of stairs, be sure to start slow and increase the amount by 10-15% weekly.
4. Buy a treadmill, elliptical, or exercise bike as a Christmas gift that the whole family can enjoy.
5. Create a home gym; this can easily be done for \$100 and up.
6. Order a workout video to spice up your home workouts.

7. Hire a personal trainer for workouts in your home or to develop a program for you and help get you jump started

Watching your total caloric intake is also something you need to be aware of to keep off those unwanted pounds. Most people feel hungrier in the cold weather; this is due to a drop in body temperature which actually stimulates the appetite. Eating food will then cause your body to heat. According to Nancy Clark, MS, R.D. "Thirty to sixty minutes after you eat, your body generates about 10% more heat than when you have an empty stomach. This increased metabolism stems primarily from energy released during digestion. Hence, eating not only provides fuel but also increases heat production, warmth". So be careful not to over eat as a result of this.

By staying fit and watching your diet you can beat the winter blues and be prepared for outdoor activities in the spring. Stay fit and have a wonderful holiday season.

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