

Tips to beat the winter blues

As the COVID-19 situation remains at the forefront of our days, 2020 has come and gone and now in 2021 we are in lockdown again. People are finding it tougher and tougher to shift that low feeling. A lot of us go in to hibernation mode every time the cold comes around, socialising less and feeling like we only have enough energy for binge-watching TV shows. With lockdown it seems we are forced into this hibernation without choice. So some of us may be finding that we tend to do things like oversleep, overeat, feel guilty, irritable and hopeless. These feelings are often associated with Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD) but for some individuals it may not be something to label and is perhaps just down to the current situation we are in and feel lower than usual. So how can we help ourselves to feel a bit better?

Tips to look after your mental wellbeing through the winter

- 1. Reach out for help as early as possible** – especially with things like debt or finances, or with your mental health.
- 2. Have a routine and set short-term goals** - planning for today, tomorrow, the next week. If you have big, difficult tasks on your plate try breaking them up into chains of smaller, more manageable jobs.
- 3. Build in more breaks and exercise into your schedule** – research has told us that walking and time in nature were the two key things that helped the nation cope with the stresses of the pandemic.
- 4. Look at your sleeping habits** – sleep is essential for our mental health and if you are having trouble sleeping because of worry there are things you can do to improve your sleep, from relaxation to not watching TV in bed. If you find watching the news distressing, try to avoid it for a while and see if your sleep improves.
- 5. Find the positives from the first lockdown** - it could be things you did, or challenges you overcame. Ask yourself what was helpful then, and what you can take from that for now. Try to find an online book group, exercise class or even choir.
- 6. Plan your finances this winter** – including making sure you are getting any benefits you are entitled to and getting help with any debt concerns you may have. You can also visit the Care first Lifestyle site for supportive information and budgeting tools.
- 7. Stay connected** – The importance of staying connected to your friends, family and community is to ensure that you don't become lonely. Feeling lonely is a normal human emotion. But, when you feel like this for long periods of time, it isn't just unpleasant – it's actually bad for your health. Having someone to talk to is important, so remember to pick up the phone or send that text, keep those support networks going.
- 8. Find time for your needs** - it can be easy to serve other people at work or at home, or to fill our diaries with commitments and activities that crowd out our own needs. Whether it's booking leave from work, shutting the bathroom door for a shower or bath away from the kids, or getting out for a run alone – find something that works for you and make it happen.
- 9. Make friends with cold, dark days** – if you think of winter as one of the regular seasons, perhaps it could be a time for reflection and doing more things like reading, relaxing, getting warm and cosy and recharging our batteries. When the days are darker and we can't take our mood energy boosts from socialising in the sun, it may make sense to replace this with another energy-boosting activity like exercise or a hobby like cooking. Going out when it's dark and cold might seem unappealing, but taking a break from our screens, and getting some natural light during the day can really help our mood.

10. Give yourself a reward – it's important to celebrate small wins – even if that's just in your head. A win could be clearing a work task or it could just be getting up and dressed. A hot chocolate after a walk outside, a new book or even a moment of peace on the sofa are all small rewards.

How can Care first help?

If you feel you may need some emotional or practical support, you can contact Care first. Care first is a leading provider of confidential, professional counselling, information and advice services. Whilst our BACP accredited counsellors are available 24/7 to provide support for emotional issues, our expertly trained Telephone Information Specialists are available 8am-8pm Monday-Friday to provide advice on any practical issues that may be causing you a stress or worry and help you feel more in control of a situation. All employees are eligible to use Care first, our services include; telephone counselling, information services and online support.

If you would like to learn more about **'Tips to beat the winter blues'** Then please join our webinar on **Tuesday 26th January at 12pm** using the details below –

<https://attendee.gotowebinar.com/register/5986600432497086475>

If you are unable to join the webinar live, a recording of the session can be accessed using the same link above after the webinar has taken place. If you wish to contact the Care first telephone counselling and information line then please don't hesitate to call the Freephone number provided by your organisation and you can speak to a professional in confidence.

Useful sources & Information:

Some of the information sourced for this article was originally published by the Mental Health Foundation. If you would like to access this and further information in more detail please follow the link below –

<https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/coronavirus/facing-winter-during-coronavirus-pandemic>