



## Beat the winter blues

The cold and dark got you down? Perk up in just one day with these easy steps

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The days are short, the sun is MIA, the holidays are over, and the weather is as inviting as a wet wool blanket. No wonder you feel like climbing back into bed with a pint of [ice cream](#).

Up to 20 percent of adults suffer from the a mild form of seasonal affective disorder, better known as the winter blues. “The increased hours of darkness disrupt brain chemicals that affect mood,” says Kathryn A. Roecklein, Ph.D., an assistant professor of psychology at the University of Pittsburgh. But that doesn’t mean you have no choice but to mark the days until spring. Sprinkle these strategies into your day and watch your mood improve.

### 6:30 a.m. to 7:30 a.m.: Catch a sunrise

It will set the tone for your day, boosting levels of serotonin, your brain’s feel-good chemical. Not up for an early morning? Try to get 30 minutes of [sunlight](#) a day, suggests Stephen C. Josephson, Ph.D., a seasonal depression specialist and associate professor at the Cornell University Medical School. If it’s gray for much of the winter where you live, consider light-box therapy, in which you sit for a half hour in front of a box that mimics outdoor light (about \$100 and up). “They have results similar to antidepressants and with far fewer side effects,” Josephson says.



### 7:30 a.m.: Eat breakfast—always

Besides improving energy and curbing cravings, breakfast helps regulate your internal clock, or circadian rhythm, research suggests. Aim for a combination of complex carbs and protein with a smaller amount of [healthy fat](#), suggests Jackie Newgent, a registered dietitian in New York City. Try oatmeal made with fat-free milk and topped with dried fruit, nuts, and seeds; granola with plain [Greek yogurt](#), berries, and sliced almonds; or an egg with grits topped with bell peppers sautéed in a little [olive oil](#).



### 12:30 p.m.: Get some (fun) exercise

Besides improving energy, [exercise](#) releases mood-boosting chemicals. If you can do it outside, all the better, as that gives an extra dose of sunlight. Set aside at least 30 minutes a day for your favorite activity, like walking your dog or jogging. When it's cold, go mall walking or, if you have access to an indoor pool, swim or do water exercises. "Your joints benefit from the hydrostatic pressure, and being immersed in warmish water when it's cold outside feels like pampering," says Gina Allchin, president of Health Trek Personal Training Technology in Fort Lauderdale, Fla. ANOther good option: an [indoor exercise machine](#). Check our reviews of [ellipticals](#), [rowers](#), [spin bikes](#), and [treadmills](#).



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### 3 p.m.: Have a smart snack

Cravings for sweets really do go up during winter months, since they trigger the release of the pleasure-producing chemical dopamine. But sugar will cause your [blood glucose](#) level to spike and then crash, leaving you hungry again. Instead, bust afternoon hunger pangs with a combination of protein, fiber, and healthful fat, which will keep you full until dinner. Good choices include apple slices with peanut butter, or a snack-sized bag of mixed nuts, or popcorn sprinkled with Parmesan cheese. (Read our [popcorn review](#).)



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### 5:30 p.m.: Do something nice for someone

Research suggests that small, random acts of kindness can indeed lift your spirits. Try this as your day winds down: Pay the toll for the car behind you on the way home; invite someone who's new at your office or in your neighborhood to lunch the next day; or help a friend or relative move. It will silence your inner grouch.



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### 7 p.m. to bedtime: Relax

Set yourself up for a good night's sleep—and counter the effects of stress—with an unwinding ritual that begins early in the evening. Before dinner, hit the "off" button on your phone and computer; after dinner, soak in a hot bath or sip a cup of caffeine-free tea. Meditate for 10 minutes right before you hit the sheets. And count your blessings to help you fall asleep. Studies have found a correlation between reflecting on the things you're grateful for and a more positive emotional state. (Use our advice on [how to sleep better](#) and check our [mattress reviews](#).)



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