

6 Tips To Maintain Your Health This Winter



Fight the Winter Blues

Why are the months in which we are most prone to doing less the ones in which we feel the most stress? Because gorging on fatty comfort foods, skipping social engagements and cutting back on exercising are exactly the kinds of activities that increase stress levels.

There is a difference between simply feeling rundown and being diagnosed with Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD). Women's health expert Dr. Christian Northrup calls SAD "the PMS of the annual calendar."

"What it is, is you're not getting enough serotonin. So the reason you're getting depressed is absolutely real," she says. "Natural light is a nutrient and it hits our retinas and it increases our serotonin in our blood so everybody in Chicago, everyone in the whole northern areas needs some natural light."

How can you get any natural light when the days are so short and it's so cold out you can't imagine getting up from under a duvet, much less venturing outside? Dr. Northrup says some artificial lights can mimic the effects of sunlight. Look for a light box that advertises sunlight wavelengths or a light bulb with full-spectrum lighting.

Avoid Holiday Weight Gain

A study from the *New England Journal of Medicine* reported that most Americans gain about a pound between Thanksgiving and New Year's Day. Maybe the most surprising part about that is that it's *just* a pound.

But that single pound can cause lasting damage. "Putting on a pound or so every year makes a big difference when you never get around to losing it," says Pat Vasconcellos, a Massachusetts-based spokeswoman for the American Dietetic Association.

Completely avoiding sweets, fatty foods and alcoholic drinks is probably out of the question—but a smart plan can make a huge difference in limiting empty calories. Before you start piling up your plate at a dinner or party, scan the whole spread and make smart choices. Even though it's a holiday, all of the healthy food rules still apply. When possible, stick to whole grains, lightly-dressed green salad and lower-fat white turkey meat. And make sure to drink plenty of water.

Looking for healthier alternatives to your favorite holiday treats? Try *Men's Health* magazine's *Eat This, Not That* guide to the holidays.

Exercise...Even if You're Stuck Indoors

Just as important as making smart eating choices while you're stuck indoors is staying active. Health experts are huge proponents of walking for at least 30 minutes a day. Even in cold weather, they say it's imperative to bundle up and hit the sidewalk. Or, in a pinch—or a blizzard—they recommend other ways to get keep your blood flowing.

Besides walking, there are other great ways to burn calories and stay in shape when you're stuck inside. Think you're too busy? Leg crunches and arm curls are perfect for any spare moment—you can even do them during a TV commercial.

Use a Humidifier

When the temperature drops, so does the humidity. Indoor heat—whether by forced air, space heater or radiator—further dries the air, leading to dry skin, sore throats, sinus problems, nose bleeds and annoying static electricity.

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A good way to replace the lost humidity is with a humidifier. The two general types of humidifiers are those that passively allow water to evaporate, and those that actively create a blown mist (using blades, brushes or vibrations).

The main drawback to humidifiers is that if they are not kept clean, they can spread bacteria. Plan to clean them regularly—as often as every other week.

Be Smart About Shoveling Snow and Heart Attacks

Is the threat of a heart attack while shoveling snow an urban legend? Actually, it's very real and deadly. A 1996 *New England Journal of Medicine* study pointed out that these sudden heart attacks can strike people with no history of heart disease, and are more likely to occur in older people with otherwise sedentary lifestyles.

This particular chore is so deadly because of a combination of factors. First, the activity is strenuous—it can burn up to 200 calories in 30 minutes. Second, it is done in the cold which causes blood vessels and arteries to constrict and make a heart attack more likely.

The best ways to protect yourself are:

- Shovel early when the snow is lighter.
- Use proper technique—try pushing the snow instead of lifting it. If you have to lift, use your legs, not your back.
- Stay hydrated, as you would with any intense exercise.
- Take breaks often.
- Know the warning signs of a heart attack: chest pain, arm pain, dizziness, fainting, nausea or shortness of breath.

If you have a history of heart problems, consult your doctor before any physical exertion including snow shoveling.

Stay Safe from Hypothermia

Hypothermia is when a person's body temperature drops to dangerously low levels—below 95 degrees—and their body cannot produce enough heat to warm up. Some of the causes include exposure to the cold without proper clothing, wearing wet clothes in extremely cold temperatures or falling into frigid water.

Frostbite occurs when a person is exposed to cold temperatures for a long time and the blood leaves the extremities. Hands, feet, noses and ears are the body parts most vulnerable to frostbite. If a person who's been out in the cold shows signs of frostbite—including skin that starts out numb, hard and pale, and becomes achy when out of the cold; blisters; and develops gangrene—they may also have hypothermia.

Hypothermia should be treated before frostbite.

In the northern United States, frozen lakes and ponds are commonly used for skating, hockey and ice-fishing—but they could pose real dangers for hypothermia and frostbite if the ice isn't thick enough, or a crack suddenly develops.

Survival expert Bear Grylls, host of the Discovery Channel series *Man vs. Wild*, says if you fall in the frigid water, the first thing to do is not panic but get out of the water as fast as possible.

As soon as you're a safe distance away, remove your wet clothes and try to get dry. According to Bear, a former member of the British Special Forces, you lose heat 25 times faster when you're wet than when you're dry. It may seem counterintuitive, but Bear suggests using powdery snow to sop up excess water. To get the blood pumping, do push-ups, jumping jacks or run in place