



December

# Member Newsletter



## Winterize your mental health

It's common to feel glum, sluggish and just not up to par during winter's dimmed sunlight, dreary weather and limited opportunities for physical activity. On the bright side, taking small actions can stoke your mood and energy, helping you beat the "winter blues." Try these suggestions:

**Go outside for a 10-minute daily dose of sunlight.** Even on gray days, light from the sun plays a role in your body's production of serotonin that helps regulate your energy, mood and sleep quality.

**Get your body moving!** Physical exercise ("nature's antidepressant") can increase endorphins, the feel-good hormones. Moderate exercise for at least 30 minutes most days of the week may provide the biggest mood boost. On days that you work, try to get up and walk around, taking the stairs whenever possible. If you're running errands, pace up and down the grocery store aisles. Just keep moving!

**Power up with healthy foods.** Aim for a balanced diet of proteins, whole grains (e.g., brown rice, quinoa) and plenty of fruits and vegetables. Studies show that this can help you have higher levels of optimism and lower levels of depressive symptoms.

**Source:** [www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7019743/](http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7019743/)

**Reach for vitamin D-rich foods.** Especially if you live in northern climates with months of scarce sunshine, you may lack sufficient levels of vitamin D (the "sunshine vitamin"), which is needed for energy. Choose dairy foods and foods naturally fortified with vitamin D, such as mackerel and other fish. Ask your health practitioner about vitamin D supplementation.

**Do something new or fun.** Whether you volunteer for a work assignment, join a winter walk at the nature center, or take a pottery class, find what sparks your enthusiasm and momentum.

**Take time to slow down and recharge.** Read, listen to music by candlelight, or hang out with friends. Keep your sleep schedule on track and avoid filling up on too many holiday goodies! Plus, curb alcohol, which can affect your moods.



### Do you have Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD)?

You may have SAD, a type of depression, if you have ongoing sadness and low energy that begins and ends the same time every winter and that affects your normal functioning. Talk to your doctor or a qualified counselor for steps to take. You can also call Health Advocate for help finding the right support and resources.

**Source:** [www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/seasonal-affective-disorder/symptoms-causes/syc-20364651](http://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/seasonal-affective-disorder/symptoms-causes/syc-20364651)



## Renew your course for better health

Despite our good intentions to stick with healthy habits, life's distractions and unexpected changes can derail us and keep us stuck. Even our own mindset can sabotage our quest to get healthier. Nevertheless, it's not too late to get back on track, no matter what obstacle you're facing. Here are some suggestions:

**Adopt the habit of saying “I can” and “I will” vs. “I can't” or “I won't.”** This simple self-talk tweak can boost your confidence and increase your chance of getting through many obstacles. Keeping reminders of your positive qualities and achievements handy can also help propel you through challenges.

**Detect what emotions trigger bad habits.** Notice if anxiety, boredom, loneliness or another emotion leads to overindulging in snacks or alcohol, mindless TV-watching or phone-scrolling. Next time you're feeling this way, try taking a few slow deep breaths, focusing on the moment. Then get up, drink some water, go fold laundry, put on a playlist and dance, or call a friend.

**Figure out a plan to stick to good habits.** For instance, if a change in schedule affects your intention to eat better, try to pre-plan simple, nutritious meals for the week. Keep bowls of fruit in plain sight and healthy grab-and-go snacks handy.

**Make a reasonable strategy to reach your goals.** Say your goal is to walk a million steps to slim down by next month so you'll have more energy and to fit into your jeans. Especially if you've been sedentary, it's wiser to focus on a more achievable time frame that includes mini goals. Start by walking around more often and going to more neighborhoods (or paths) for six months, gradually adding time and distance each week.

**Jot your worries in a journal.** If anxious worries are stealing time from restorative sleep or being productive, set a specific time to write them out in a journal (list some solutions, too!). This can help train your brain to only worry at your designated journaling time.

**Are physical or mental health issues holding you back?** Speak to your health practitioner or a counselor to help you feel your best so you can move forward for better health.



## Relearn respect

To respect someone means that you accept them for who they are and treat them kindly, even if they are different from you or have beliefs you don't agree with. We live, work, and learn among diverse social groups, and respecting others is important for everyone's well-being. These tips can help you be more respectful toward others.

**Accept people as they are without trying to change them.** Appreciate the person's differences and see what you can learn from them.

**Be polite.** There are many ways you can show respect by being polite, including saying please and thank you.

**Maintain eye contact and listen fully when someone is speaking.** Avoid looking at your phone or at other distractions.

**Think before you speak.** Before responding, count to 10 to gather your thoughts.

**Try not to interrupt.** Truly listen and give the other person the attention you would like to have.

**Limit strong conversations in interactions** where heated debate can lead to unnecessary conflicts.

**Finally, follow the number one rule of respect:** Treat others the way you would want to be treated.

For more help, talk to Health Advocate, your health practitioner or a qualified counselor.

### Universal Human Rights Month

To reach good health and well-being, your rights as a human being must be protected. This month, the protection of all human rights is recognized in honor of the United Nations' adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) on December 10, 1948. To observe Universal Human Rights Month, read the UDHR [www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights](http://www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights); donate to—or volunteer with—human rights campaigns; or simply talk with people of diverse cultures, race, religions, sexual orientations, physical abilities, and socioeconomic classes. Making connections fosters respect and understanding that can lead to change.