

# Sound Self-Care Strategies for Winter Well-Being

*Understanding and coping with the unique and very real challenges of the winter season*

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*In the weeks leading up to the dreading turning back of the clocks, integrating sound self-care strategies can go a long way to help you cope with what is for many of us the most challenging time of the year*

It's that time of year again. As it gets darker by the day in the northern hemisphere, and we prepare to set our clocks back an hour in the first weekend of November, many of us start to dread the coming season and its shorter days, low moods, sub-zero temperatures, and increased isolation.

## **Losing more than the light**

Many of us experience mild seasonal symptoms, known widely as the winter blues. It is widely known that to some degree, we are all impacted by decreased levels of sunlight once the clocks go back, during the winter months. Our circadian rhythms — our internal clock — feel the impact. As a result, we often struggle to maintain healthy sleep patterns during the winter months. We often overeat, lose the motivation to exercise, and adopt a sedentary lifestyle to avoid the unpleasantness of winter. Most people tend to be more sociable when the weather is warm and sunny. In the colder months, we prefer to hibernate, and in doing so rob ourselves of the benefits of staying socially active and connected to people we love and enjoy.

## **Troubling seasonal symptoms**

For many, shorter days and diminishing access to natural light bring on Seasonal Affective Disorder (S.A.D.). Its effects range from mild to severe, and, for some, debilitating. According to the Canadian Psychological Association: *"Approximately 15% of Canadians will report at least a mild case of SAD in their lifetime, while 2-3% will report serious cases."* More women than men are diagnosed with Seasonal Affective Disorder and Seasonal Depression.

Serious and often overwhelming symptoms of Seasonal Affective Disorder, or Seasonal Depression, include a lack of interest in life, low energy, difficulty concentrating, serious sleep

struggles, significant weight gain due to changes in appetite, fatigue, anxiety, and social isolation. Those struggling with clinical Seasonal Depression may experience suicidal thoughts.

## **Sound seasonal self-care**

There is a lot we can do to combat symptoms of Seasonal Affective Disorder and manage its impact on our physical and mental health and well-being.

## **Here are seven sound self-care strategies for the season ahead.**

**Make an effort** to stay connected to your feelings and patterns: Have compassion for yourself if you are struggling with the loss of light, symptoms of low mood, low energy, or an urge to isolate, overeat, or oversleep.

Realize that you could be struggling as a result of diminished sunlight and that you could be suffering from mild to severe symptoms of Seasonal Affective disorder.

**Expose yourself:** Get out of doors, and expose yourself to natural sunlight light daily, and as much as possible. Even when the weather is overcast, you will benefit from spending time outside. Try to find an outdoor activity that you can enjoy. A brisk daily walk with a friend, spending time in nature, skating, hiking, skiing, or even window shopping will lead to greater exposure to natural light, and its benefits.

**Consider** using light therapy: A lightbox — also known as a light therapy lamp — provides a specific source of light that mimics the sun's rays. Sitting in front of a lightbox daily for several minutes at a time can be a highly effective

means of combatting low moods and energy levels.

**Stay** active and in touch with friends and family. Prolonged periods of isolation and a sedentary winter lifestyle can lead to low moods, and unhealthy choices, like over-indulging in carb-heavy comfort foods, a lack of exercise, and an over-reliance on devices to stay in touch with others. Instead make plans to get together in person as much as possible. Spend time engaged in activities, pursuits, and interests that bring you joy.

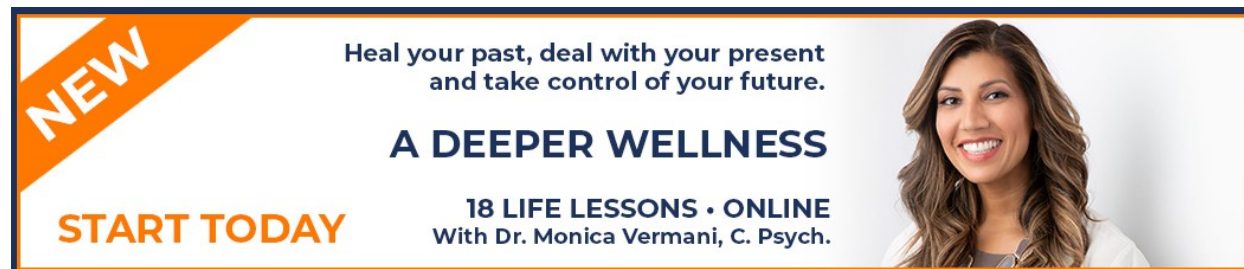
**Pay** attention to what and how much you eat. If your seasonal dietary choices include higher than usual amounts of carbohydrate-rich processed and 'comfort' foods, set an intention to make healthier choices. Make sure you consume healthy, nutrient-rich unprocessed foods in your diet. And consider including vitamin B and

D supplements during the winter months.

**Resist the urge to oversleep.** Our internal clocks are impacted by diminished sunlight. This can negatively play out in our sleep patterns. During the winter months, practicing good sleep hygiene is essential. Maintain regular sleep and wake times.

Restrict exposure to screens in the hours before bedtime, and minimize screen time before falling asleep, Make sure your sleep environment is comfortable, quiet, calm, and dark.

**Seek** support if you are experiencing severe seasonal symptoms of low mood, hopelessness, or sadness. You are not alone, and there are effective ways to treat severe Seasonal Affective Disorder and Seasonal Depression. Many people who suffer from Seasonal Depression can be treated with antidepressants, therapy, or a combination of the two. Talk to your family doctor or a general practitioner, who can help you get the help you need.



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**About the author**

*Dr. Monica Vermani is a Clinical Psychologist specializing in treating trauma, stress and mood & anxiety disorders, and the founder of Start Living Corporate Wellness. She is a well-known speaker, columnist and advocate in the field of mental health and wellness.*

*Her book, A Deeper Wellness, is currently available for pre-sale on*

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