



February 2020



Beat the Winter Blues with These Helpful Tips

With February's arrival, we find ourselves in the midst of the winter doldrums: the holidays are far in the rearview mirror, the once-exciting sight of falling snow has lost its charm, and it feels like it's been ages since we've felt the sun.

During this final, seemingly endless stretch of the season, our moods typically take a turn for the worst. Nearly 15 percent of Americans experience some form of winter blues, with six percent struggling with its more severe version: seasonal affective disorder (SAD).

SAD is much more than a mid-winter slump. Officially [recognized](#) in the Diagnostic Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5), seasonal affective disorder is categorized as a subset of major depressive disorder. Its symptoms include fatigue, reduced productivity, changes in appetite, and decreased interest in hobbies or activities, among others.

If you have severe symptoms of seasonal affective disorder, you should contact your doctor or a mental health professional. But if you're among those experiencing milder versions of these signs, there are steps you can take to bolster your mood until spring.

- 1. Get your sunlight fix.** One major biological cause of winter malaise is a lack of exposure to the sun. Natural light promotes the production of hormones like serotonin (a chemical contributor to the feeling of happiness) and melatonin (the hormone associated with sleep). Exposure to sunlight can also course-correct your body clock, which the darker winter months can often interfere with. There are special lamps that emit light similar to the sun's rays, which can give these same benefits from just a few minutes of use a day.

Quick Takes

Fighting the February Fatigue

During the final, seemingly endless stretch of winter, our moods are more susceptible than ever to the seasonal blues.

While experiencing symptoms like fatigue, reduced productivity, changes in appetite, and decreased interest in hobbies or activities are normal in the late winter months, they also can be signs of seasonal affective disorder (SAD) if they persist with severity. While SAD is a serious condition that requires a medical professional, you can help fight the winter doldrums with a few of these helpful tips.

2. **Get some exercise.** It's often the last thing you want to do (especially in the winter weather), but physical activity helps increase serotonin levels and releases endorphins, another "feel-good" hormone. Take advantage of seasonal exercises like skiing, snowboarding, hiking or sledding, or beat the cold by going to the gym or taking an indoor fitness class.
3. **Eat more nutritious foods.** The holidays usually aren't the healthiest times for our diets, and that can seriously impact our mood come late winter. Research indicates that people who consume more fruits and vegetables were less likely to experience SAD and its symptoms.
4. **Get out of the house.** After the holidays, it's tempting to bunker down and be a bit of a shut-in until the weather warms up. But isolation can often worsen your mood, not improve it. Consider a regular meetup or get-together with friends, or even plan a trip. Having a few things to look forward to on the calendar makes a larger difference than you think!
5. **Get into a routine.** Our circadian rhythm impacts our mood in a major way, and the dark winter days infamously interrupt our sleep cycles. By going to sleep and waking up at the same time every day, as well as regularly eating three balanced meals, you can help keep your natural cycle in check.
6. **Use your EAP.** Many companies offer a no-cost Employee Assistance Program (EAP) to help their team members cope through issues just like these. Today's HR departments understand the challenges that come after the holidays, and can offer assistance in finding childcare, eldercare, and other resources to help ease the work-life balance and alleviate post-holiday stress. And if your symptoms continue to persist, a qualified EAP counselor can direct you to long-term help.

Winter can be a tough time for everyone, and it's normal to experience the telltale signs of the seasonal blues. But remember, SAD is a serious condition, and if your mood worsens, be sure to reach out to a medical professional.

Source: Parekh, Ranna. "Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD)." *Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD)*, Jan. 2017, www.psychiatry.org/patients-families/depression/seasonal-affective-disorder. (Accessed January 27, 2020)

Roasted Cranberry, Squash & Cauliflower Salad Makes 4 servings

Serve this healthy salad as a main course or starter. To speed up prep, use precut butternut squash.

INGREDIENTS

- 5 cups cauliflower florets (about 1 1/4 pounds)
- 5 cups cubed butternut squash (about 1 1/4 pounds)
- 6 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil, divided
- 3/4 teaspoon salt, divided
- 3/4 teaspoon ground pepper, divided
- 1 cup cranberries, thawed if frozen
- 4 large eggs
- 1/4 cup white-wine vinegar
- 2 tablespoons minced shallot
- 1 teaspoon Dijon mustard
- 1 clove garlic, grated
- 8 cups torn escarole
- 1/3 cup toasted chopped pecans
- 1/4 cup crumbled blue cheese

DIRECTIONS

1. Preheat oven to 425° F. Coat a large rimmed baking sheet with cooking spray.
2. Toss cauliflower and squash with 1 tablespoon oil and 1/4 teaspoon each salt and pepper in a large bowl. Arrange in a single layer on the prepared baking sheet. Roast, stirring once or twice, until almost tender, 18 to 22 minutes. Add cranberries and roast until they start to burst, about 5 minutes more.
3. Meanwhile, place eggs in a medium saucepan and cover with cold water. Bring to a boil over high heat. Remove from heat, cover and let stand for 5 minutes for medium-soft yolks or 6 minutes for medium-firm. Drain and cover with ice water. When cool, peel and cut in half.
4. Whisk vinegar, shallot, mustard and garlic with the remaining 5 tablespoons oil and 1/2 teaspoon each salt and pepper in the bowl.
5. Drizzle 1/3 cup of the dressing over the roasted vegetables and stir gently until evenly coated. Add escarole to the bowl and toss to coat with the dressing; add the roasted vegetables and toss to combine. Serve the salad topped with the eggs, pecans and blue cheese.



NUTRITIONAL INFORMATION

502 Calories
 35.7 g Total fat
 6.9 g Saturated fat
 192 mg Cholesterol
 699 mg Sodium
 36.6 g Carbohydrates
 11.3 g Fiber
 9 g Sugar
 14.8 g Protein