

12 ways to conquer the winter blahs

written by Dr. Ronald Hoffman | February 13, 2026



By now many of you—particularly those of you who live in the Midwest and Northeast—may be suffering the effects of a grey, sunless, protracted winter. It's been unremittingly cold and dreary here in New York City. The wan February light does little to dispel the gloom. Most of us have long succumbed to “cabin fever”.

Don't get too bent out of shape. Like many of life's rigors, this is temporary. And who's to say that February should be ecstatic? Think of our hearty forebears before central heating, indoor plumbing, Netflix, and abundant fresh food! There's a reason they used to call this “Hunger Season”!

Nonetheless, here are some tips on how to overcome late-winter torpor:

1) Light it up!

You may be in the throes of SAD (Seasonal Affective Disorder). Common symptoms include lethargy, depression, carb cravings and inordinate winter weight gain. Light deprivation impairs serotonin production in the brain and disrupts circadian rhythms. Some people are genetically more predisposed to SAD. Light therapy with an SAD light box may help lift your mood. But the timing of exposure may be key to the efficacy of light therapy, according to SAD pioneer Dr. Michael Terman.

RELATED: [10 natural solutions for winter skin dryness](#)

2) Anti-inflammatory diet

Especially in winter, there's a natural tendency to binge on sugary or starch-laden comfort foods. A consensus is emerging that you can optimize mood via avoidance of ultra-processed junk and liberal consumption of Omega 3 fatty acids, polyphenols, and fiber. An article entitled “An anti-inflammatory diet as a potential intervention for depressive disorders: A systematic review and meta-analysis” appeared recently in the journal *Clinical Nutrition*. It concluded “. . . adopting an anti-inflammatory diet may be an effective intervention or preventative means of reducing depression risk and symptoms.”

3) Skip the Hot Toddy

Cold, oppressive winter weather may stoke your desire for a warming libation, but alcohol has a way of undermining mood. Excessive drinking depletes brain neurotransmitters and undermines sleep. Find tips for reducing your alcohol consumption [here](#).



4) Exercise

Working out is a great way to dispel the blahs. On an icy or sub-freezing day, hit the gym. There's nothing like a brisk swim in an indoor pool to cheat Old Man Winter. But don't forget to get outside. A vigorous walk or jog can help acclimate you to the cold, provides light exposure, and the frigid temps will stoke your body's production of brown fat (the healthy, fat-burning kind).

5) Steam or Sauna

Russians and Scandinavians have it right—they sweat it off in steam baths and saunas. This stimulates circulation, eliminates toxins, and provides a welcome antidote to seasonal blues. Note: Schnapps, vodka shots, scouring with birch branches, and a leap in the snow or a plunge in an icy stream are optional.

6) Color Therapy

Amid those grimy, grey winter vistas, get a Technicolor infusion. I recently got mine at the Museum of Modern Art, and there's an Orchid Show every February at the New York Botanical Gardens. Find your local equivalent, buy some flowers or colorful indoor plants, or just take in the radiant spring fashions at your local mall or department store (Tip: Leave your credit cards

at home).

7) B Vitamins

B6, Folate, B2, and B12 are essential co-factors for production of endogenous feel-good neurotransmitters like serotonin, dopamine and adrenaline. Cheap B vitamins are not properly metabolized by many people with a common defect of the MTHFR gene locus. Get an instantaneous mood-lift by taking a bio-available, methylated B complex.

8) Tryptophan

Oral doses of L-tryptophan have been shown to be equivalent to light therapy in relieving SAD; moreover, in some patients who did not respond to light alone, provision of L-tryptophan along with daily light exposure relieved their torpor. Try taking 500-1000 mg of L-tryptophan two or three times daily, preferably with a light, high-carb, low protein snack. Yes, that's right, high-carb: Other amino acids from protein meals compete with L-tryptophan, and a small bump in blood sugar promotes transport of L-tryptophan across the blood-brain barrier where it's bio-transformed into serotonin and melatonin.



9) Get a Caffeine Fix

Judiciously used, especially in the morning to overcome sleep inertia, caffeine can help SAD. Small wonder that cloud-shrouded Seattle, situated at a latitude north of most of Maine, is renowned for its coffee houses! But don't forget tea, which delivers less of a caffeine jolt, and teams with l-theanine to produce calm focus. Both coffee and tea are sources of beneficial polyphenols.

RELATED: Chill out—it may be healthy for you!

10) Make Soup!

A cold bleak winter day is the perfect time to steep yourself in the delicious vapors of a warm cauldron of soup. Get a whole organic chicken and slow-cook it in a crockpot overnight. Strip the meat from the chicken and add to the broth. Season with garlic, sage, thyme, and bay leaves and add some canned organic tomatoes, sautéed onions, celery and carrots, cannelloni beans and shredded Swiss chard (Hey, I'm just riffin' here, use your own creativity!).

11) Check Your Thyroid!

Undiagnosed subclinical hypothyroidism or inadequate thyroid replacement accentuates the winter blahs. If you're cold, lethargic, depressed, have trouble getting up in the morning and can't help gaining weight, your thyroid may be to blame. Even if you're on conventional thyroid meds, they might not do the trick for you, especially under challenging winter conditions. Read my

article on why conventional thyroid treatment often fails.

12) Head South

I recently traveled to Scottsdale, Arizona for a meeting of the Alliance for Natural Health, of which I'm president, and squeezed in some hiking and bike riding. Ready to face the rigors of late winter in the Northeast renewed! To get a jump on spring, I'll follow up next month to a place where our March is their September: New Zealand!

Here's to beating the winter blahs... and have faith: this, too, shall pass!