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HEALTH BYTES

How to beat the winter blues

Besides warm blankets, hot drinks and binge-watching series – winter in South Africa also brings low mood, energy and motivation. If you've noticed you're feeling down lately, you might have the "winter blues". This is also known as seasonal affective disorder (SAD) – a type of depression linked to less sunlight.

1. Get more light

Your body has an internal clock (called a circadian rhythm) that depends on sunlight to stay on track. Less light in winter can make you feel sleepy and sad.

- Go outside for 5-10 minutes in the morning – even if it's overcast.
- Eat lunch near a window or outdoors.
- Use a light therapy lamp if you can – it mimics sunlight and can help your mood.



2. Move your body

Exercise helps your brain make feel-good chemicals. Even small amounts of movement help!

- Try fun indoor activities such as dancing and yoga.
- Do quick 10-minute workouts at home.
- Walk your dog or take a stroll after the rain.



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3. Sleep well and eat right

Feeling like you just want to sleep and eat junk? Get back into a routine.

- Go to bed and wake up at the same time every day – even on weekends.
- Avoid screens in bed – no phones or tablets.
- Wind down before sleep by reading or dimming the lights.
- Eat foods that support your mood, such as wholegrains, omega-3 rich foods (pilchards and flaxseeds) and vitamin D (ask your doctor or pharmacist about a supplement).



4. Stay social

Even if you feel like hiding away, time with others helps boost your mood.

- Host a simple potluck dinner with friends.
- Go for "walk and talk" coffee outings.
- Chat with friends on video calls.
- Start a daily gratitude challenge on WhatsApp.

Important:

If you're feeling very sad or hopeless, talk to someone. SAD can be serious.

Call the South African Depression and Anxiety Group (SADAG) on 0800 567 567 or contact your workplace wellness programme.

Source: Netcare – Seasonal Affective Disorder

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