Brighten Your Winter Mood

Winston J. Craig

*Andrews University, wcraig@andrews.edu*

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Grey skies, short days and freezing temperatures usually don’t add up to an exciting winter. But you don’t have to feel down and out when it’s gloomy outside; your outlook can be cheerful and positive. Sonja Lyubomirsky, author of *The How of Happiness,* offers strategies to provide a new level of joy. These factors can also brighten your winter mood.

1. **Express gratitude to God.** Count your many blessings.
2. **Cultivate optimism at all times.** A consistently cheerful attitude can bolster the body’s disease-fighting forces. There is also real, health-promoting value in remembering pleasant events from the past.
3. **Practice acts of kindness.** Work to make the world a better place for others to live. Reaching out to help others in need releases endorphins so you feel better and more relaxed.
4. **Nurture positive social relationships.** Socializing is a powerful way to boost your mood. While bears hibernate, humans get cabin fever when they hide away all winter. Hugging your dog or playing with your cat for ten minutes can also give yourself a mood boost and lower stress levels.
5. **Develop strategies for coping when times are tough.** Finding benefit in negative life events can also positively influence your physical health and happiness.
6. **Fully immerse yourself in what you are doing, with a sense of accomplishment, and you will find the activity or experience satisfying.** People report the greatest satisfaction and happiness when they do this.
7. **Savor the joy of life.** Take the time to savor the most amazing things about winter. You will be more content, and optimistic thoughts will start trumping the negative ones.
8. **Practice spirituality.** Have quiet moments of meditation. Be ready to forgive.
9. **Enjoy daily physical activity.** It can boost your mood and lift your spirit. If the weather is bad, use an exercise DVD of your choosing.
10. **Act like a happy person.** Happy people are healthier and more productive. A good laugh can lower your blood pressure, boost your immune system, help reduce pain, reduce stress hormone levels and improve your mental outlook.

We could add three more important factors:

11. **Feast on light.** Bright light can keep the winter blues at bay. Sunlight suppresses melatonin, a chemical that makes you drowsy. Brightening your bedroom when you wake up helps you feel happier all day. Bright fluorescent light in high-traffic areas in the home mimics sunlight better than incandescent bulbs.
12. **Eat healthfully.** Avoid high-sugar comfort foods. These can play havoc with your blood sugar level, and leave you feeling irritable.
13. **Anticipate a getaway.** Planning a vacation, or even thinking about one in the future, can make you happier. If you cannot leave town mid-winter, start researching a spring or summer vacation. Even thinking about it will be magic for your mood.

Being happy and contented improves not only the quality of your life, it also extends your life. Research found that the happiest people, ages 52–79 years, were 35 percent less likely to die during a five-year period than their gloomier counterparts.

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**Winston Craig, Ph.D., RD, is a professor of nutrition at Andrews University.**

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