

Newsletter

Beating the winter blues

The Wellbeing in Mind Team

Spring Term 1

Winter blues

During the winter months, it is not uncommon for children and young people to experience low mood as the days are shorter and it gets dark much earlier. Daylight affects two chemicals in the brain called serotonin and melatonin. When it's sunny, the brain produces more serotonin. High levels of serotonin boost feelings of happiness and wellbeing. Low levels lead to low mood aka 'the winter blues'. When it is dark, the brain also produces more melatonin. High levels of melatonin can cause you to feel sleepy and have less energy.



Shorter days and more hours of darkness in fall and winter may decrease serotonin and increase melatonin. This means people are more likely to experience low mood during these winter months.

Signs that your child might be struggling with the winter blues

Every young person is different, but typical signs that your child is struggling with the winter blues may include:

- Feeling worthless or hopeless
- Decrease in energy
- Having trouble sleeping
- Depressed or irritable mood
- Changes in weight or eating habits
- Fatigue
- Social withdrawal
- Difficulty concentrating
- Lack of enjoyment in things that usually interest them



Top tips for beating the winter blues

Keep active

- Research has shown that a daily one-hour walk in the middle of the day is one of the most helpful ways of coping with the winter blues. Being active and taking part in exercise is the quickest way to boost your mood and provide you with that feel-good feeling. It doesn't have to be anything too strenuous; a brisk walk can be very effective.



Get outside



- Try to encourage your child to go outdoors in natural daylight as much as possible, especially at midday and on brighter days. When they are inside at home, try to get them to sit near windows whenever they can so they are getting as much natural light as possible; this can really help to boost their mood and give them more energy.

Keep warm

- Stay indoors if the weather gets really cold. Try to keep the main room that your family spends time in warm, heating it to a comfortable temperature if you can. Hot water bottles, electric blankets and heated throws can help your child stay warm at night or when they are sitting still in the daytime.
- If your child is indoors more than usual, encourage them to stay as active as you can by getting up and moving around every hour; this will boost their mood and energy levels. If your child does go out, remind them to wear plenty of warm layers as well as a hat, scarf, and gloves to keep their head and hands warm.

Eat healthily

- A healthy diet will boost mood, give your child more energy and prevent them from putting on extra weight over the winter. Try to balance any cravings for carbohydrates, such as pasta and potatoes, with plenty of fresh fruit and vegetables.



Take up a new hobby

- Try to encourage your child to keep their mind active with a new hobby or interest as this can help to ward off symptoms of the winter blues. It could be anything, such as singing, sports, knitting, joining a new after-school club, keeping a journal, or reading. The important thing is that your child has something to look forward to and concentrate on every day.

See your friends and family

- It has been shown that socialising is good for your mental health and helps ward off the winter blues. Try to encourage your child to make extra effort to keep in touch with friends and family they care about and accept any invitations they get to social events, even if they only go for a little while. Often, going out even when you don't want to can help you to feel better by boosting motivation.



Seek help

- If your child's symptoms of the winter blues are so bad that they are struggling to live a normal life, seek medical help from your GP.

