How the Season Affects Your Mental Health

If you've felt down lately, you are not alone. In fact, winter is often a tough time for our mental health.

According to the <u>American Psychiatric Association</u>, winter is a time when many people experience symptoms similar to depression or seasonal affective disorder (SAD). That's because it gets dark early, and there's not as much sunlight during the day.[1] Sunlight helps stimulate the brain neurotransmitter serotonin that helps regulate mood.

But did you know there are simple things you can do every day to help you stay mentally healthy?

The <u>University of Michigan Depression Center</u> and the <u>Lancet medical journal</u> offer these seven tips.[2]

- **Find a friend.** Talking to a peer or someone you trust can help you find support and inspiration. This can come through the forms of in-person conversations, phone calls and even discussions online.

- **Give yoga or meditation a try.** In the moment, meditation is a way that you can recognize where your stress is coming from without attaching much meaning to it. It's a form of relaxation that you can do at the start or the end of your day. Mindfulness is also really helpful. Finally, yoga positions give you an opportunity to relax your nervous system and calm your mind. Don't forget to breathe!
- **Listen to music.** Turning on your favorite tunes can help relax your body and become a distraction from stressful situations. Classical music has also been known to lower blood pressure and lessen stress hormones.
- **Keep a journal.** Writing down what is on your mind can help you organize your thoughts, recognize what triggers your thoughts and modify any negative thoughts you may have. Make a commitment to writing on a regular basis. And create an environment that will help you relax as you are writing.
- **Get a good night's rest.** Not sleeping well can negatively impact your mental health. So, establish a routine to wake up and go to bed at the same time each day. Take a half hour before your bed time to unwind, relax and cool down.[3]
- **Eat a healthy diet.** Did you know your nutrition can affect your overall mood and well-being? Include plenty of fruits, vegetables and lean meats and proteins in your diet. Try not to eat as many processed foods or saturated fats. And restrict the amount of caffeine and sugar you take in, too.
- **Exercise regularly.** Numerous studies have shown that physical exercise has been proven to help reduce mental health conditions. Even a brief 5-10 minute walk can help. So take a deep breath, and take a quick walk to help center your mind.[4]

References
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