



## Fighting the Winter Blues

As winter settles in and the joyful celebrations of the holiday season are behind us, many find that our spirits drop, too. We can experience changes in mood and behavior, feelings of exhaustion and develop depression from the lack of sunlight. These winter blues can be made even worse by unrealistic expectations, unpleasant holiday memories, isolation from friends and family and confinement from cold weather.

At Family Service of Morris County (FSMC), we urge you not to succumb to the urge to stay indoors, curl into a ball and eat junk food! Fight back and brighten up your winter with these expert tips from our FSMC counselors:

1. **Expose yourself to more light.** Have your bedroom lights turn on a half hour before you wake up by plugging in a bright florescent lamp into a timer to avoid the difficulty of waking that accompanies the winter blues. Once up, expose yourself to sunlight as early in the morning as possible and maximize the number of hours you experience daylight. Wake up early, lift the shades and go outdoors as soon as you get out of bed.
2. **Exercise to raise those serotonin levels,** which improves your mood and reduces stress. If possible, exercise outdoors!
3. **Eat foods that are known to improve depression.** [Nutritious foods](#) that can help contain the essential amino acid tryptophan (turkey and chicken), folate (beans and cheese), vitamin D (mushrooms and fatty fish), and omega-3 fatty acids (also oily fish), and zinc (whole grains, oysters).
4. **Take up a winter activity.** Cross country or downhill skiing, snowboarding, snowshoeing, winter hiking and cycling, ice skating, sledding, tubing, winter photography, playing or listening to music, winter nature observation or astronomy are all good ways to embrace winter and give yourself a reason to look forward to the season.
5. **Brighten your home.** Uplift your spirits by decorating your home with warm colors reflecting the sun, such as red, orange and yellow. Use pillows, candles, table cloths and other accessories. Hang cheerful artwork and grow potted plants.
6. **Celebrate with friends and family.** Throw an “undecorating party” after Christmas, have a cabin fever party when the holiday lights are gone from the streets and homes, turn up the heat at home and invite your friends over in their favorite summer outfits for a “summer in winter” party, or find an [obscure winter holiday](#) to enjoy. The very best antidote for winter blues is connecting with others and finding reasons to celebrate.

7. **Volunteer.** When our focus is on others, we often forget our own problems and by working with others whose needs are greater than our own, we frequently develop a sense of gratitude for the things we do have.
8. **Nurture yourself and feed your spirit.** Have a cup of tea, cuddle up with a book you have been waiting to read, listen to music you love or treat yourself to theater tickets or a new technological gadget. Get your day off to a positive start with a gratitude journal in which each morning you write five things for which you are grateful.

Family Service of Morris County has many local resources to help you through this challenging season. If you are a senior needing some extra care, consider getting out and socializing at one of the [FSMC Adult Day Care Centers](#) located in Madison, Morris Plains and Succasunna or better managing your care with [Enhanced Geriatric Care Manager](#). If you are a caregiver, attend a free [FSMC caregiver support group](#) on Wednesday evenings. If you are struggling with depression or other life challenges, check out our [counseling program](#). Common wisdom says that the best way to help yourself is to help others, so consider [volunteering](#) with FSMC to help others in need during these winter months.

Even though winter may not be your favorite time of year, enjoy the beauty and activities of the season and keep a positive attitude. Before you know it, spring will be here!