

life

20 ways to thrive this winter

Many of us dread the darker, colder months, but it can be a time of restoration. Here, experts reveal everyday ways to embrace the season. By **Emily Cope**

As a nation, we don't deal brilliantly with winter. It is something to hunker down and endure, to moan about to friends and neighbours as you count down the days until spring. But it doesn't have to be this way. "People underestimate how pleasurable winter can be – but you have to go into it prepared, both physically and mentally," says Kari Leibowitz, a psychologist and author of *How to Winter: Harnessing Your Mindset to Thrive in Cold, Dark or Difficult Times*,

who a decade ago moved for a year from the US to Tromsø in Norway, where the sun doesn't rise for two months a year.

"In Norway, people have a positive attitude towards winter. They see it not as a limiting time of year, but as one full of opportunity. A few lifestyle changes and a different mindset can go a long way towards helping you to live more in tune with the season."

Here, a range of experts reveal how sleeping, eating, moving and thinking a little differently can help us embrace, and even thrive, throughout winter...

Embrace winter-specific pleasures

"When we focus on the season's limitations, we feel those limitations acutely. But when we train ourselves to work with rather than against winter's qualities, we can find opportunities for comfort and pleasure. Many activities are more enjoyable when it's cold and rainy, such as baking, knitting, art, reading, going to museums and the cinema. Or you can find pleasure in sipping a warm drink by the fire. We so often look at winter for »

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what it isn't, wishing it were other warmer, brighter seasons, but the cold and darkness can make space for more restorative or creative activities that aren't open to us in warmer climes. Look for the opportunities winter provides and indulge in them." **Kari Leibowitz**

Finish at 5pm

"During dark, wintry days it can be tempting to stay indoors and keep working, but at this time of year it is more important than ever to maintain a healthy work/life balance. Avoiding social interaction can lead to feelings of isolation and depression, so finish work on time and avoid checking work emails outside of hours. By keeping to these boundaries, you are more likely to be focused and efficient during the working day and have greater job satisfaction. Use your personal time for self-care, exercise, hobbies and socialising, as these activities will boost your mood and recharge your energy." **Alison Goolnik, psychotherapist, Therapy Here**

Avoid hot showers

"This may not be a welcome piece of advice, but indulging in hot showers can damage skin. This can be especially problematic in winter, when skin can become dry from indoor heating and outside temperatures. Try to wash with warm water and use hypoallergenic formulations and perfume-free products that target sensitive skin, so as not to strip away natural oils. It is also important to choose a moisturiser that suits your skin type. For oily, acne-prone skin, go for one that won't clog pores. For those prone to eczema and rosacea, choose a thicker moisturiser for extra protection." **Dr Ophelia Veraitch, dermatologist**

Keep bedrooms for sleep and sex

"Although we don't hibernate, research shows that we do need more REM sleep in the winter. To make sure you are getting enough rest, it is important to be strict with your bedtime routine. Bedrooms should be for sleeping (and one other thing). That means no phones, TVs, knitting or journaling

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in the bedroom. Stick to no caffeine after 3pm and reduce fluids two hours before bed to prevent midnight toilet breaks – which no one wants on a freezing cold night." **Natalie Mackenzie, brain and cognition expert**

Tackle tough jobs in the morning

"Winter can affect your energy levels throughout the day, but managing your tasks around natural energy peaks can optimise both your mental wellbeing and work output. Schedule your most challenging or creative tasks for when your energy is highest – this is often

Turn down the heat at night

"Being too hot or too cold at night can negatively affect our sleep. An ideal night-time bedroom temperature is around 16-18°C, as this allows a drop in core body temperature as we sleep. With the reduced temperatures during the winter, you may wish to increase the tog (or thickness) of your duvet so that you don't get too cold in the night, and you could consider a separate duvet from your partner if you have different preferred nighttime temperatures." **Lindsay Browning, sleep expert at Trouble Sleeping and author of 'Navigating Sleeplessness'**

Get outside

"Try to spend time outdoors every day, especially in the morning, when the light is brightest, to make the most of natural daylight, which is vital for our circadian rhythm. Even a short walk can boost your mood – but be sure to dress appropriately for the weather. If you can spend time in nature, the benefits will be even greater, as it has been proven to improve mood and reduce blood pressure." **Dr Elena Touroni, consultant psychologist and co-founder of The Chelsea Psychology Clinic**



Clockwise from top left: avoid hot showers; read a book you've been meaning to; schedule time for a morning walk; arrange your workspace near a window; dark leafy greens are rich in vitamins; take up a new hobby such as baking; coffee can lift your mood; don't even knit in the bedroom GETTY

Open up your home

"While spending time outdoors is always best, make the most of the amount of natural light you are exposed to at home and in the office. Sitting near a window or keeping curtains open during the day can help your body adjust to shorter days. If you can, arrange your workspace near windows to soak in any available natural light; if this isn't an option, use lamps to simulate daylight and reduce feelings of drowsiness." **Dr Elena Touroni**

Have sex

"Sex has been shown to have numerous health benefits, including lowered stress, depression and anxiety, perhaps due to the release of oxytocin and a fall in cortisol levels. Getting intimate can also reduce pain, and improve sleep and immune function, which is essential for staving off colds and infections during the winter months. Plus, orgasms can boost circulation and reduce inflammation, helping you to stay warm on cold nights." **Dr Deborah Lee, sexual and reproductive health specialist Dr Fox Online Pharmacy**

Curb the carbs

"Our bodies require slightly more calories than normal to stay warm in winter, but greasy, refined carbohydrates such as pizza and chips will make you feel more sluggish in the long run. Instead, opt for comforting meals that are going to make you feel full, but are also packed with nutrients. Bone broth is full of the vitamins and nutrients that your body

needs to fight off sickness, including protein, energy-filled electrolytes and essential amino acids. Or opt for hearty stews with dark leafy greens, such as spinach, kale, and bok choy, which are rich in vitamins such as magnesium and vitamin B to help regulate mood." **Dr Abir Hamza-Goodacre, nutritional therapist, Benenden Hospital**

Drink coffee

"Drinking coffee is a great way to feel more energised. Researchers have found that drinking a cup of coffee containing 75mg of caffeine every four hours can lift your mood over the course of a day (although be sure to tail off your intake in the afternoons if you have sleep issues). Coffee also contains a high concentration of polyphenols, which counteracts neuroinflammation and stimulates the production of new brain cells. Just watch out for added sugars in syrups and creamers, which can offset the health benefits and send blood-sugar levels soaring." **Dr Deborah Lee**

Slow down your exercise

"Winter is a time for hibernation in the animal kingdom, but so often people try to 'push through' the seasonal change, then wonder why their exercise motivation wanes. Don't force yourself to stick to your 'usual' intense

Lean in to lower forms of exercise that match the cosy vibe of winter – mat Pilates or yin yoga



conditioning training and HIIT classes if it's not working for you. Lean in to lower impact forms of exercise that match the cosy vibe of winter – whether that's mat Pilates, slow strength training or yin yoga." **Nancy Best, personal trainer and founder of Ladies Who Crunch**

Be kind

"Acts of kindness not only improve friendships and relationships, they can also lower blood pressure and benefit the immune system. During winter, when so many people struggle with low mood, being kind can elevate levels of dopamine and oxytocin in the brain, and some acts even produce endorphins. Try talking to loved ones about how they are feeling, buy a stranger a coffee, or help a friend with some chores." **Dr David R Hamilton, author of 'The Joy of Actually Giving a F**k'**

Set goals

"The winter months are often quieter when it comes to social plans. Use this time to set yourself a goal that you'd like to achieve before spring comes around again. It could be anything, from decorating a particular room to finishing a book you've always wanted to read or taking up a new hobby. Challenging yourself with something new can give you a renewed sense of purpose and motivation." **Dr Elena Touroni**

Hibernate, don't stagnate

"Honour the impulse to hibernate by allowing yourself to get more rest – but don't get lazy. Enjoy cosy evenings, but make sure you are getting out and about during the day. If you can't face moving outdoors, get down on the floor and do some stretches. Watch your intake of sugar, comfort food and booze, and remember that comfort can also come in the form of candles, a nice bath or grounding practices such as snuggling in with a weighted blanket." **Suzy Reading, psychologist and author of 'Self-Care for Winter'**

Be selfish

"It is not uncommon to agree to social events or family plans that you would really rather avoid, especially during festive periods. However, overextending yourself can lead to resentment or burnout, as well as illness. Decide your non-negotiables early – whether that is protecting family time or ensuring you have quiet evenings to rest. Communicate your boundaries

with friends, family and colleagues so you are not caught in a cycle of over-commitment and remember that a gentle but firm no can protect your energy while allowing you to be fully present when you do say yes." **Charlotte Bailey, psychotherapist**

Adjust social plans

"It is normal to feel your appetite for social interaction change in winter, but we still need to plug in and feel connected. Allow the nature of your connections to evolve and find different ways of coming together. If you don't fancy being out of an evening, make brunch plans or schedule time for a morning walk and a coffee." **Suzy Reading**

Resist lie-ins, even at the weekend

"While it is tempting to sleep in, especially when it is cold outside, a consistent waking routine helps to regulate your body's circadian rhythm. Long lie-ins can disrupt your natural sleep-wake cycle, making it harder to fall asleep at the right time the next night, and you may miss out on vital morning sunshine if you lie in too late. If you feel that you need some extra sleep at the weekend, consider an early afternoon nap (around lunchtime) when we have a natural circadian dip, rather than oversleeping in the morning." **Lindsay Browning**

Take a daily vitamin D supplement

"The NHS recommends that between October and March, people in the UK should take a vitamin D supplement (10 micrograms a day will be enough for most people). This is really important for your bone and muscular health, as well as boosting your immune system. It can also help combat SAD (seasonal affective disorder), so it is valuable for your mental wellbeing, too." **Nancy Best**

Sip herbal teas

"Herbal teas are useful in helping you to recover from cold and flu symptoms, as they contain plenty of antioxidants and are hydrating. Green tea contains high levels of L-theanine, which is a chemical that has been shown to support cognitive functions, sleep and blood pressure, and to encourage relaxation. Peppermint tea can help with an upset stomach, constipation and irritable bowel syndrome, while rooibos tea can improve blood pressure and circulation." **Dr Abir Hamza-Goodacre**