



# Mindful Living Blog:

Winter and Wellbeing Collection

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# Introduction

Welcome to the Mindful Living Blog – Winter and Wellbeing Collection!

This collection has been designed to bring together a series of articles from the Mindful Living blog, all of which centre on the themes of winter and wellbeing. The articles in this guide provide an introduction and an entry point into ways in which you can support your wellbeing, particularly during the winter months, which you can explore in your own time.

Within each article you will find information on the topic, as well as an invitation. We hope that you will find these invitations thought-provoking and use them to engage in your own process of self-exploration and mindful practice. Above all, we hope that this guide will help to inspire you as you progress on your own journey.

This downloadable guide can also be printed. Please feel free to share it with others who you think may benefit from the content it contains.

As always, we really enjoy hearing from our readers and our wider community. Please feel free to share your thoughts and experiences with us. You can connect with us via the website or by emailing [anna@dunami-somatics.com](mailto:anna@dunami-somatics.com).

Happy reading!

Anna and Diana

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# 5 Green Habits to Support Wellbeing

In recent years, people worldwide have realised how much the natural world has to offer, not only in terms of physical space, but also in the many ways in which it can support our physical, emotional and mental wellbeing. In this article, we consider ways in which we can develop healthier, greener habits that can support and benefit our wellbeing, as well as our planet.



*Photo by Anna Dako.*

## 1. Create Your Own Growing Space

Growing your own plants, fruits or vegetables is a fantastic hobby and one which can help promote positive mental health, as well as supporting the health of our planet. If you have a garden, consider planting your own vegetables. You could also research local or native plants or flowers and try to plant more of those to support the local ecosystems. Similarly, consider planting flowers which attract bees, as bees are one of the most crucial pollinators and in great need of our help and support. If you don't have a garden, consider joining a community garden group or applying for an allotment in which to grow your own food.

Another increasingly popular option, is to grow plants, flowers, vegetables or herbs on your windowsill. This can be a really lovely activity to do, particularly if you have children. Growing your own plants, and encouraging children to learn how to take care of them correctly and watch them grow, can be a very rewarding experience and one which instils important eco-conscious habits for the future.



You could also get creative and make your own mini gardens using empty glass jars. These are also known as terrariums and again, make for a wonderful family activity. Simply use some soil, stones, shells or any other natural materials that you want to include. You could even add some small toys or figures to create a green scene!



## 2. Home Cooking

Home cooking offers a much healthier alternative to ready meals or take-aways. Not only does it help you to save money, but it puts you in control of the ingredients you're using and where you source them from. If you grow your own vegetables or herbs, then home-cooking is the ideal choice. Alternatively, consider supporting local businesses and farmers by purchasing local, seasonal produce. Eating a more plant-based diet is also a simple way to help the environment, as it will help to reduce meat consumption.

Moreover, home-cooking gives you the opportunity to experiment with different recipes and to create meals which minimise added fats and sugars. It can also be a therapeutic activity, giving you the opportunity to clear your mind and make mindful choices about what you eat. Involving your family in the cooking process can help make home cooking a more fun experience, as well as providing you with an opportunity to bond.



### 3. Go Hiking with Family

For many people, a daily walk became a ritual of lockdown. Why not take a hike somewhere new? Perhaps there's a nature reserve you've been missing? Or maybe there's a particular hill you've been meaning to hike to the top of?

Hiking also allows you the opportunity to improve your physical health, stamina and enables the body to produce endorphins. Furthermore, research suggests that people who spend time walking or hiking tend to develop more eco-friendly habits and practices. This is especially important for children, as those who spend time outdoors when young, will have a greater chance of developing eco-conscious practices when they are older.



*Photo by Anna Dako.*

## 4. Spend Time Outdoors in Nature

Spending time outdoors in nature has been proven to promote positive mental health and to help prevent anxiety, stress and depression. As the warmer weather and longer days approach, there really isn't a better time to get outside! Make sure that you always wear appropriate clothing and have protective sunscreen on when you go outdoors.

As well as walking or hiking, you could go cycling or spend the day exploring a new natural reserve or beach. Spending time outdoors with your family, particularly with children, is not only a lovely family activity, but it's also an opportunity for learning and creating wonderful memories. Why not do a woodland trail or go beachcombing?

You could also take your exercise routine outside. As well as running, consider doing yoga, Pilates, martial arts, dancing or doing an exercise class in your garden or local park. You can also spend some time in quiet meditation, or why not have a go at doing one of our [audio guides](#)?



*Photo by Anna Dako.*

## 5. Bring Nature Inside

It's not always possible to spend as much time outdoors as we might like. However, we can bring nature indoors! Whether you choose to buy (or grow) some flowers or potted plants for your home, or make decorations using natural materials, there are a range of ways to help you feel closer to nature when inside.

As well as collecting natural materials to create artworks and decorations for your home, consider collecting natural outdoor sounds and images. You can take photographs of your favourite outdoor locations and frame these in your home. Similarly, make recording of birdsong, rainfall or the ocean and play these in the background. You can also find many recordings online. Finally, consider creating a comfortable place near a window where you can relax and take a moment to pause and reconnect with the outdoors.



## **An Invitation...**

Take as long as you can to simply encounter the natural world and spend some time really and truly engaging in active listening. You can use this opportunity to engage in some mindful practice or meditation outdoors as well.

Take the time to reflect on yourself in the natural space, as well as to listen to the space itself. Engage all your senses as you open your awareness to the sounds, the smells, textures and rhythms of the natural environment. Allow yourself to be open and to truly sense all that the Earth has to offer you. What green habits can you develop? How, in supporting yourself and your wellbeing, can you also simultaneously support the Earth?



*Photo by Anna Dako.*



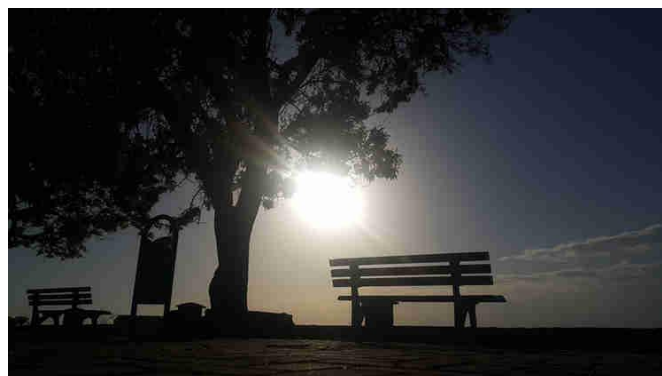
# Coping With The Dark Winter Months

The dark winter months can feel long and lonely. For some people who suffer from seasonal affective disorder (SAD) however, they can be especially difficult to cope with. Yet, spending time outdoors and increasing our exposure to sunlight is precisely what we must strive to do to help us cope and stay healthy during the winter months.

## What Is SAD?

Seasonal affective disorder (SAD) is a form of depression which has a seasonal pattern. It is most severe during the winter months, particularly in the period between December to February and for this reason is sometimes referred to as the “winter depression”. Symptoms can begin in the autumn, as daylight hours begin to decrease, and tend to improve during the spring months as the days get longer again. However, some people do suffer from SAD during other times of the year as well.

As with other forms of depression, SAD is most typically characterised by a persistent low mood and a lack of interest in life or daily activities. Those suffering from SAD may also be more irritable, feel anxious and stressed. Additionally, sufferers may also feel more lethargic and find that they are sleeping more than they would do normally. Some people also find themselves craving carbohydrates and eating more, which can lead to weight gain.



## What Causes SAD?

It's not fully understood what causes SAD. However, it's believed to be linked to reduced exposure to sunlight during the shorter days of winter. Sunlight is important for our bodies and can have an impact on some of the hormones and chemicals in the brain. There is some suggestion that SAD is caused when the hypothalamus (which is a part of the brain responsible for controlling mood, appetite and sleep) stops working correctly.

As a result of this, the body may begin producing higher levels of the hormone melatonin, which can lead to people feeling sleepier than normal. Similarly, lack of sunlight can also affect serotonin production. Serotonin is the hormone linked to mood, sleep and appetite. Lower levels of serotonin can lead to increased feelings of depression. Finally, reduced exposure to sunlight can negatively impact upon the body's circadian rhythm or body clock.



## Coping With SAD

Fortunately, there are a range of treatments which can be used to help people cope with the symptoms of SAD. In more extreme cases or when individuals feel they are unable to cope, it's always advisable that they seek medical help and support from their GP. GPs can recommend the most suitable treatment programme for each person, which may include talking therapies (such as cognitive behaviour therapy or counselling) or even antidepressant medicines, for more extreme cases.

However, there are also a number of treatments and strategies which you can implement in your daily life which have been found to offer relief to most sufferers. Even better, these are healthy strategies which can help improve the mood and wellbeing of all individuals, not just those suffering from SAD.

### ***1. Increase your exposure to sunlight***

Despite the cold winter months and the lack of sunlight, it's important to motivate yourself to go outside every day and get a little natural light. Even if you just spend 10 minutes outdoors, this can significantly impact on your mood and wellbeing. Try to get as much exposure to natural sunlight as you can every day. It will help you to feel refreshed, more alert, energised and positive.

### ***2. Go for a walk outside***

Whether you go alone or with your family, try to go for a walk outdoors. If you have a local nature reserve nearby, aim to go for a walk there. Taking a walk in a green space has been shown to improve mood and reduce the feelings of anxiety and stress. It doesn't need to be a long walk, but getting into the habit of doing this every day will prove highly beneficial.

### ***3. Exercise outdoors***

Exercising outdoors is a great way to stay healthy and increase your exposure to sunlight at the same time. Perhaps you've taken up a new exercise regime this new year? Why not have a go at doing it outdoors? Consider going for a run or start cycling. You can do this with your family too if you need the extra motivation and it can be a fun way to spend more time together.



#### ***4. Increase Natural Light Indoors***

Avoid spending your time indoors in dark or dimly-lit rooms. Instead, make sure that you open the curtains and let in as much natural light as possible. You can also try using some well-placed mirrors to help increase light in darker spaces within your home. Try to open the windows occasionally to increase ventilation and provide some fresh air to make you feel more energised.

#### ***5. Use A Light Box***

Many SAD sufferers have found that using a light box to simulate exposure to sunlight can help to decrease the symptoms of SAD. The special lamp increases blue light, but importantly does not contain harmful UV rays, so it can be used safely. Just a few minutes of exposure a day can provide relief.

### **An Invitation...**

Whether you are suffering from the symptoms of SAD, or you are finding the darker winter months harder to cope with, we invite you to join us in going outside this week.

Make a commitment to go outside every day, whatever the weather. It doesn't have to be for a long time – a mere 10 minutes can be enough to begin with. Perhaps you can make this a family event? If you have children, going out for a family walk can be a welcomed break from the pressures of home-schooling and will help to avoid cabin fever from setting in. If you can, go for a walk in a green space.

Alternatively, take your exercise outdoors. Whether you go for a run, a family cycle, mindful walking or even doing some somatic practice, yoga or martial arts in your garden or local park, give it a try.





*Photo by Anna Dako.*

If you need a bit more motivation, why not sign up for some [audio guided Walks to Wellbeing?](#) It's perhaps more important than ever to take up this opportunity and ensure we can increase our exposure to sunlight. In so doing, we can ensure that we are looking after our whole health – physical, emotional and mental.

# Embracing All Types of Weather

During the autumn and winter months, as the darkness encroaches upon us earlier each day and the weather turns colder, it can be tempting to avoid the outdoors. Yet, in so doing, we also cut ourselves off from nature and the many benefits which it can bring to us for our health and mental wellbeing. The key, is to learn to embrace the weather and change our attitude towards it.



*Photo by Anna Dako.*

## Deterred by the Weather

On the whole, we are not often taught to enjoy the weather. Very often, we are taught instead to describe or regard weather in simple terms, such as “good” or “bad”. Generally, sunny, warm weather is considered to be good; whereas cold, wet weather is regarded as bad. For the most part, we tend to be deterred by what we consider to be “bad” weather. The idea of going outside and spending time in nature can become unappealing when we consider that it may also come with the prospect of added mud and dirt. Of course, the dominant factor is often the temperature. When it is cold, we have a greater tendency to stay indoors where it is warmer.



Rather than be deterred by the cold and wet weather, what if we learn to adapt and embrace it? In so doing, we open ourselves up to the possibility of learning more about the natural environment we live in, as well as providing ourselves with further spaces in which to fully breathe. Taking this one small step can also help us to socialise with others in outdoors settings, thereby supporting our wellbeing and reducing the likelihood of isolation and loneliness.

## **Embrace the Weather**

In the first instance, enjoying the weather requires appropriate clothing. Make sure that you invest in appropriate winter attire, such as a good-quality waterproof coat. A warm coat with a good hood can make all the difference when it comes to being outdoors in wet and windy weather. Invest too in appropriate footwear, especially if you are anticipating going on walks through woodlands or terrain which may become slippery and muddy during the coming months. Sturdy walking boots or wellies can be useful additions to your wardrobe.

Equipping yourself with clothing and footwear that you are confident will keep you warm and enable you to continue to access the outdoors can make a big psychological difference in how you view the weather. Once you know that you are prepared for all types of weather, you are more likely to take a chance and actually go outdoors. Overcoming this first hurdle can be the key to unlocking the outdoors in winter for you and your family.



The second aspect, and perhaps the hardest one to achieve, is to rest your mindset and approach to different types of weather. Instead of viewing these as simply “good” and “bad”, try instead to approach different weather condition with the same curiosity and potential for discovery that children do.

View the different weather conditions as an opportunity to make new discoveries about your local and familiar outdoor locations. Take the opportunity to explore how walking in your favourite woodland differs when it is raining compared to a sunny day. How does the weather impact on your mood? How does the familiar setting change in the different weather conditions? What smells are brought to fore? What is revealed that once was hidden?



*Photo by Anna Dako.*



## An Invitation...

We invite you to begin your journey of embracing all types of weather. Take a walk outside, if possible, in your local nature reserve. Whatever the weather, make a commitment to go, ensuring that you are wearing appropriate clothing and footwear.

Observe how it feels. Instead of fighting the weather conditions, try to embrace them. How does the rain feel as it falls on your skin? How does your body react to a gust of wind? How do you feel as you squelch in mud? What sounds do you notice?

Take a moment to be still and focus on your breathing. How does it differ to breathe in the space in the rain compared to the sunshine, in the cold compared to the heat?

If you have children, it can be particularly enjoyable to take a walk as a family. Children will usually naturally embrace all weather types far more readily than adults. Take your lead from them. Allow yourself to approach the different types of weather conditions from the view of new possibilities and discoveries.

# Motivate Yourself To Go Outdoors

During the cold winter months, it can sometimes be hard to find the motivation to go outside. The days can be dark, wet and cold, meaning that the comfort of our homes may seem more appealing. But as we spend more time at home over the winter, it's more important than ever to make it a habit to spend some time outdoors as often as we can.



*Photo by Anna Dako.*

Whether you choose to go for a run, take a stroll around your neighbourhood or go on a family walk to a local nature reserve, spending time outdoors can help to boost your mood, increase your focus and improve your overall health and wellbeing.

So, what are the barriers preventing us from making the most of the outdoors and how can we overcome them?

## **Wear Layers**

Before heading outdoors, make sure that you are wearing layers which you can easily take off. This can be especially important if you're going for a long walk or hiking. It's easy to forget that as we walk and exercise, our bodies begin to warm up. The benefit of wearing layers is that you can simply take them off if you start to get too hot and sweaty. As you cool back down, you'll have your layers ready to put back on, keeping you warm until you get back home.

It's also important to remember your feet! Cold, wet feet can make a walk horribly unpleasant and an experience you won't want to repeat. Make sure you wear suitable footwear and keep your feet cosy with thick winter socks. Scarves, gloves and hats are also key winter essentials.

If you keep yourself warm, then you're more likely to have a more enjoyable experience outdoors. The cold, wet weather won't seem like such a barrier in future, meaning you'll be far more likely to want to go out again next time.



*Photo by Anna Dako.*

## **Warm Up When You Return Home**

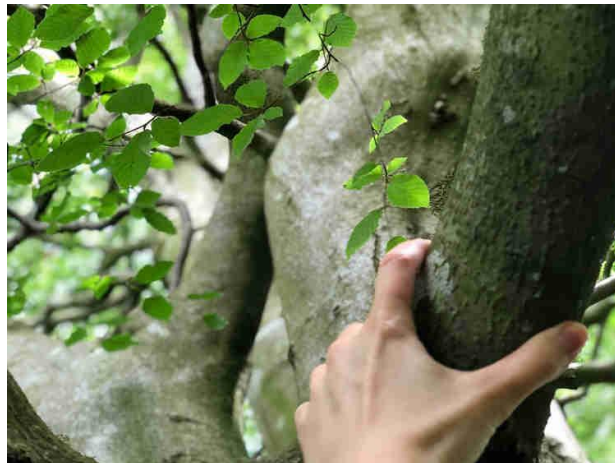
One of the best things about returning home from a winter walk outdoors is warming up when you get back inside. Take a lovely hot shower or indulge in a relaxing bath. If you have young children, this can be the perfect opportunity for a lovely bubbly bath or some water play.

Alternatively, cosy up on the sofa with some blankets and a hot water bottle. Having a hot drink once you're home can help you to warm up and give you an opportunity to take a few minutes to relax.

## Look After Your Skin

It's easy for your skin to become dehydrated, dry and cracked in the cold weather. The increased use of antibacterial gel can also contribute towards especially dry hands. However, rather than let than be a factor preventing you from going outdoors, take control and protect your skin.

Ensure that you moisturise your skin before going out into the cold. It can also be the perfect excuse to invest in a moisturiser you've long been considering or wanting to try out. Think of it as an opportunity to treat your skin to some much-deserved love and care.



*Photo by Anna Dako.*

## Make It A Habit

The more often you go outdoors, the more likely you are to repeat it again in the future. Aim to make going outdoors a daily habit. Start off with just a few minutes each day and slowly build up the amount of time you spend outdoors. Incorporating time outdoors into your daily routine will mean that you'll want to keep going, whatever the weather.



## Make It Purposeful

Make your time outdoors purposeful so that you have greater motivation to actually go outside. Maybe you want to make your time outdoors dedicated exercise time? Or perhaps, you can make it a daily family activity? You might want to use it as an opportunity to take a break from work/home-schooling.

You could also consider signing up to an online exercise class that you can do outdoors. Or perhaps engage in mindful practice outdoors. Use time outdoors as an opportunity to connect with others and maybe call a friend. Alternatively, use it as an opportunity to share a hobby with a loved one (e.g., going for a run together).



*Photo by Anna Dako.*

## An Invitation...

However uninspiring the cold winter months may seem, it's essential that we all try to spend some time outdoors. Aside from the health and wellbeing benefits it offers, it's also a much-needed change of scenery from the confines of our homes. If you have children, it's can be especially important to motivate not only yourself, but also them to get outdoors each day.

We invite you to start going for a daily walk. You can start with just a 10-minute walk on your own or with your family. Maybe use the walk as a chance to start your day with more positivity and energy, or else as a relaxing reward at the end of the day.

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