

Beat the winter blahs



Some winters, it's hard to know how we do it. Between the short days and long nights, the cold temperatures and gloomy skies, and the stress that many people feel during the holidays, winter can brew up a "perfect storm" for the blues. For people with MS, the demands of the season may feel even more intense when compounded by disease-related symptoms such as fatigue and depression.

Rosalind Kalb, PhD, a clinical psychologist and the National MS Society's vice president of Clinical Care, has some tips for warming up to winter.

- **Exercise.** "Exercise is always good for general health and managing mood," says Dr. Kalb. While winter may do its icy best to keep you inside, you might explore adaptive winter sports (see "[Ready, set, snow](#)"), or indoor options such as yoga. For more ideas, visit nationalMSSociety.org/exercise.
- **Balance.** Dr. Kalb recommends finding a balance between "me" time and staying in touch with others. "Avoid isolation during stressful months, but don't let yourself get overwhelmed by too much activity," she says. Don't be afraid to go small: You may want to choose an intimate dinner with a few family members and friends over a big holiday party.
- **Sunshine.** Recent research has indicated potential benefits of vitamin D for people with MS. One source of vitamin D is that same sun you've been seeing so little of the last month. Make some time each day to go outside, whether you're just sitting on a park bench in the sun for a few minutes or taking a walk around the block (but limit your exposure so you don't burn). Visit nationalMSSociety.org/vitaminD.
- **Attention.** Dr. Kalb stresses paying attention to your moods and knowing there's a difference between regular winter "blahs" and depression. "For most people, the winter season and holidays bring a mixture of pleasure and stress," she says. "If the season

brings only distress, sadness and emptiness, depression may very well be the source of the problem.” Call your healthcare provider right away if you suspect depression.

Visit [nationalMSSociety.org/depression](https://www.nationalmssociety.org/depression) to learn more.