

January 23, 2013

NEWS RELEASE



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Winterproofing your mental health

Some people say this is the most depressing week of the year—when cold and dark days, holiday bills, and already-lapsed new year’s resolutions catch up with us. Whether you believe in that or not, it’s never a bad time to reflect on how time-of-year stresses and opportunities can affect your mental health.

HeretoHelp.bc.ca, BC’s nationally-acclaimed website on mental health and substance use, offers 8 tips to winterproof your mental well-being.

“These tips are great for everyone, but even more so if you live with or at risk of a mental illness,” says Sarah Hamid-Balma, HeretoHelp’s coordinator at the Canadian Mental Health Association.

1. **Move it** – Weather and less daylight can be easy excuses to stop exercising, but winter still offers a lot of great indoor and outdoor activities. “Exercise isn’t just good for our physical health—it’s proven to reduce depression, anxiety and stress. The key is to find something you like to do and can fit in your routine,” says Hamid-Balma.
2. **Soak up the day** – Expose yourself to as much natural daylight as you can whether it’s exercising outdoors or sitting near windows at work or taking part of your lunch break to walk outside.
3. **Don’t isolate** – It can be tempting to shut yourself up in winter, but if you do it too often, you can isolate yourself from other people. Connecting with other people is a huge boost to mental health. The more you isolate, the lower you can feel which just makes you want to isolate more. And meaningful face-to-face connection (away from screens) is important too.
4. **Don’t hibernate** – If you feel more lethargic in winter, you may feel like sleeping more. Getting enough sleep is definitely important but keeping a consistent sleep routine, even on weekends, is good for both mind and body. An occasional brief nap can be refreshing, but longer ones more frequently can interfere with energy and night sleep.
5. **A cup of wellness** – Water replenishes brain cells and can help prevent headaches and improve energy and concentration so grab H₂O even when you’re not thirsty; waiting for thirst means you’re already dehydrated. Watch other liquids too. With longer evenings and hockey back on, beware of too much alcohol, which people forget is a depressant. Coffee, tea and hot chocolate can be wonderful in winter but watch out for too much caffeine especially if you’re prone to anxiety or sleep problems.

HeretoHelp is a project of the BC Partners for Mental Health and Addictions Information. We are seven nonprofits working together:

AnxietyBC, BC Schizophrenia Society, Canadian Mental Health Association’s BC Division, Centre for Addictions Research of BC, Jessie’s Legacy Program of Family Services of the North Shore, FORCE Society for Kids’ Mental Health, and Mood Disorders Association of BC. Funding provided by BC Mental Health & Addiction Services, an agency of the Provincial Health Services Authority

6. **Curb the comfort carbs** – People tend to only talk about ‘comfort food’ in winter, and a lot of it can be carbohydrate rich. An overabundance of carbs can affect not only your waist line, but also your energy level and mood.
7. **Renew a lapsed resolution** – If you’ve already given up resolutions to lose weight or stop smoking, restart them by adding a mental health resolution. “You’d be surprised: if you add a resolution aimed at lifting your mood and social support, or reducing stress and anxiety, you may find you get a lift in motivation and energy that will make those other resolutions easier to tackle,” says Hamid-Balma.
8. **If you’re not yourself, check things out** – About 15% of Canadians feel the ‘winter blahs,’ which usually don’t have a lot of impact on our lives. But if you haven’t been feeling yourself for several weeks and it *is* impacting your life, it may be something more serious that you need support for. Talk to your doctor to rule out other reasons or visit the Get Help section at heretohelp.bc.ca for other resources.

If you want more tips to improve your well-being or loved ones’, or more information on managing mental health and substance use problems, visit the new and improved HeretoHelp at www.heretohelp.bc.ca. The site features hundreds of personal stories, tip sheets, fact sheets, workbooks, discussion forums, event listings, screening self-tests, and material in other languages. All free, made in BC, and based on good evidence.

Since 2004, HeretoHelp has been a trusted resource of the BC Partners for Mental Health and Addictions Information, a group of seven leading provincial mental health and addictions nonprofit agencies working together to help individuals and families better prevent and manage mental health and substance use problems. The agencies are AnxietyBC, BC Schizophrenia Society, Canadian Mental Health Association’s BC Division, Centre for Addictions Research of BC, FORCE Society for Kids Mental Health, Jessie’s Legacy program of Family Services of the North Shore and Mood Disorders Association of BC. The Canadian Mental Health Association’s BC Division coordinates the website on behalf of the BC Partners.

HeretoHelp is funded by BC Mental Health and Addiction Services, an agency of the Provincial Health Services Authority.

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