

# MIDWINTER ENERGIZERS

Have a case of the doldrums? Here are a week's worth of ways to help you *beat the blues* and lift your mood.

BY KAREN ASP

The holidays are past and, in many places, it's cold and dreary outside. But don't think you have to wait until spring to start feeling better. Reenergize with our daily power-up plan and kick your funk now. By the end of the week, even each day, you should be feeling a new high.

## SUNDAY

**Exude gratitude:** Take time to really think about what you appreciate in life, and your energy level will increase. "Research shows that when you experience gratitude, it shuts down stress, which can suck positive energy from you," says Elizabeth Lombardo, Ph.D., author of *Better Than Perfect: 7 Strategies to Crush Your Inner Critic and Create a Life You Love* (Seal Press; 2014). Do this by starting a gratitude journal: Every day, jot down the three things you're most grateful for, no matter how small they seem—the hug your child gave you in the morning, the hour of yoga you squeezed in before work, or the old friend you ran into at the grocery store. Or institute a thankful time during dinner, when everybody shares what they're most grateful for that day.

**Picture a happy place:** Another simple way to ease stress is to picture a happy place, Lombardo says. Find a quiet space, close your eyes for two minutes,

and imagine a place that makes you happy. That visualization will stick in your subconscious, giving you a mental lift.

**Plan something new:** Perhaps you've run around like a maniac through the holidays, and now you have to pay bills and clean up the mess. "It's one big holiday hangover," says Pamela Peeke, M.D., author of *Body for Life for Women* (Rodale; 2009). To remedy that, sign up for dancing lessons, a midwinter art class, or some other new activity to perk up January and February.

## MONDAY

**See the light:** Get a dose of sunshine; it can do wonders for your energy level. "Research has shown that light is one of the most potent agents for synchronizing your internal body clock, which regulates your circadian rhythms and energy levels," Peeke says. Plus, some people suffer from seasonal affective disorder (SAD), a form of depression related to the change of season, namely less natural sunlight in winter, and light therapy can be an effective treatment. If you get outside, you'll reap double the rewards, as studies show that just being in nature can increase your vitality and energy. If getting outside is tough for you or not delivering enough light, try using a light therapy box, such as the Happylight Liberty 10k Natural

Spectrum Energy Lamp (\$99.95; [verilux.com](http://verilux.com)). Set it on your breakfast table or desk for 30–45 minutes every day, says Jacob Teitelbaum, M.D., author of *The Fatigue and Fibromyalgia Solution* (Avery; 2013). **Fuel up every three to four hours:** "If you feel crappy, which will happen when you don't eat often enough, you could then binge and pack on pounds," says Susan M. Kleiner, Ph.D., RD, author of *Power Eating* (Human Kinetics; 2013). By keeping your tank full throughout the day, you'll keep all of your internal engines burning (hello, faster metabolism!) and your energy up. Think of these as mini meals and plan to eat carbs, protein, and fat at each one. Some ideas: apple slices topped with nut butter, an omelet made with one whole egg plus egg whites and filled with sautéed veggies, or hot chocolate made with 1 cup warm fat-free milk, 1–2 teaspoons unsweetened cocoa powder, and a little natural sweetener such as stevia.

**Spice up your life:** Turmeric is the current spice darling because of its medicinal properties. It is the ingredient in curry powder that gives it such a vibrant yellow color, and it is available as dried spice powder and in fresh root form for grating like you would ginger. Turmeric has been found to be helpful in easing depression, according to Teitelbaum. To get





## QUICK ENERGY BOOSTERS

Try one of these two-second pick-me-ups whenever your spirits are sagging:

- **Get a whiff of coffee;** the aroma will perk you up, Alan Hirsch, M.D., says.
- **Jump up and down.** You'll naturally feel like a kid, which will make you smile, and your body will release neurotransmitters to give you positive energy, Elizabeth Lombardo, Ph.D., says.
- **Think about your next vacation.** If you don't have one planned, get one on the calendar or start looking at travel websites.
- **Repeat a positive affirmation,** such as "this is a terrific day."

maximum benefit from this spice, you need to use a lot or a highly absorbed form. Teitelbaum recommends the turmeric-based supplement CuraMed (\$33.95 for thirty 750-milligram softgels; [terrynaturallyvitamins.com](http://terrynaturallyvitamins.com)). Take 750 milligrams once or twice a day.

### TUESDAY

**Temper your news intake:** News might keep you connected to the world, but it can also increase your worries and anxieties, according to a study from the *British Journal of Psychology*. Couple that with Tuesday being the day your mood is the lowest, according to other British research, and this is reason enough to limit your intake to just enough news to stay in the know without getting overwhelmed by what you learn.

**Get fishy:** Fish contain two omega-3 fatty acids, docosahexaenoic acid (DHA) and eicosapentaenoic acid (EPA), and those acids have been found to beat depression, says Kleiner, who lists oily, cold-water fish such as salmon (even canned salmon) and tuna among good-mood foods. Aim to eat three to five fish-based meals a week. A more convenient and cost-conscious

option is a good quality fish oil supplement. Teitelbaum recommends a one-tab-a-day fish oil supplement such as Vectomega (\$45.95 for 60 tablets; [terrynaturallyvitamins.com](http://terrynaturallyvitamins.com)).

**Move it, sister:** Getting 150 minutes of moderate activity or 75 minutes of vigorous activity each week is associated with higher levels of energy and lower levels of fatigue in women, according to a study in *Medicine & Science in Sports & Exercise*. Not a huge exercise fan? Speed up your mall- or dog-walking and add those activities to your exercise tally.

### WEDNESDAY

**Try a chocolate high:** "Chocolate contains natural antidepressants that increase mood and a mild stimulant called theobromine, which increases energy," Teitelbaum says. Nosh an ounce a day, veering toward dark chocolate for the best benefits. If you're worried about the sugar, opt for sugar-free chocolate.

**Crank the tunes:** Music has the power to remind us of positive times in life, Lombardo says. So when you need an easy instant lift, play music that makes you feel good. Lombardo even has her clients create a playlist of songs that

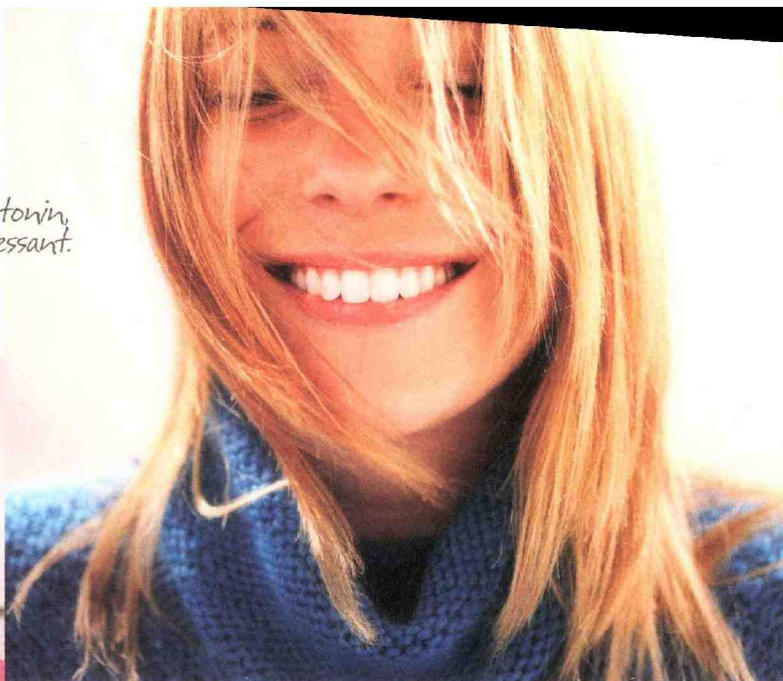
give them positive energy, such as songs they listened to while getting ready to go out in college or romantic favorites shared while dating a partner. Whenever they need a pick-me-up, they push "play."

**Hang out with an energizing friend:** It's midweek and time to rejuvenate with the help of a good friend. Set up a green tea date or a quick noontime walk-and-talk. "Positive energy is infectious," Lombardo says, adding that because the opposite is also true, you should spend less time with people who suck energy from you.

### THURSDAY

**Straighten up:** Turns out, your mom was right when she told you not to slouch. Your posture can change your energy level, with a more upright stance lifting your energy. "Changing your physical position from looking down to looking up more is associated with better moods," says Erik Peper, Ph.D., a professor at San Francisco State University. Need some easy tricks to improve that posture? When sitting, hold a small pocketbook in the hollow of your back. When standing, imagine you have a hook attached to the back of your head

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 release endorphins and serotonin,  
 the body's natural antidepressant.



that is pulling you up. Or use a wearable device such as Lumo Lift (\$99.99; [lumobodytech.com](http://lumobodytech.com)) that will give you a gentle buzz when it senses you are slouching.

**Turn that frown upside down:** Laughing releases endorphins and serotonin, the body's natural antidepressant, says Judith Orloff, M.D., assistant clinical professor of psychiatry at the University of California, Los Angeles and author of *Positive Energy* (Harmony; 2005). So look for opportunities to laugh, whether that means watching a comedy show, pulling up a two-minute funny video online, or playing with kids. If you're having trouble finding something to laugh at, force yourself to smile, which will release the same happiness hormones, Lombardo says.

**Practice forgiveness:** Grudges can feel like 50-pound anchors, which can cause extreme exhaustion, Lombardo says. Forgiving doesn't mean you necessarily agree with the person you're pardoning, but releasing anger and resentment can lift that huge burden from your shoulders and restore some of your energy.

## FRIDAY

**Cut a rug:** Kids love to dance for one simple reason: It feels good. "Doing something joyful will make you feel more joy," Peeke says. Ask friends or your spouse to go out dancing, or play music when your kids get home from school and hold a family dance party.

**Put your sniffer to work:** Whiffing jasmine has been found to elevate energy. "It increases beta waves that increase your alertness," says Alan Hirsch, M.D., neurological director of the Smell and Taste Treatment and Research Foundation in Chicago. Pick up a bottle of jasmine essential oil or a jasmine-scented candle, or sip a cup of jasmine tea. Other scents that can increase energy include peppermint, mint, citrus, and coffee.

**Take a soak:** Immersing yourself in water, in a tub or shower, can relax you and restore positive energy. "Water flushes negative energy from you," Orloff says. Although she recommends soaking in hot water, cold water works—even just a splash on your face can put a little more pep in your step.

## SATURDAY

**Tackle a to-do:** There's no time like the present, especially since you're likely

inside more these days, to complete that project you've been putting off. What about working on those photo albums or organizing your kitchen storage containers and lids? You'll honestly feel so relieved when you're finished that your energy level will surge, Lombardo says.

**Do good:** People who volunteered reported improved mood and lowered stress levels, per a study from UnitedHealth Group. Find volunteer opportunities at [volunteermatch.org](http://volunteermatch.org) or focus on doing something nice for somebody at least once a day. For instance, smile at a stranger, look the grocery store cashier in the eye to say thank you, or hold a door open for somebody. "Those little acts are as powerful as big ones," Lombardo says.

**Engage in a favorite hobby:** Remember how much fun you had as a kid when you pursued your hobbies? Rekindle that excitement by devoting time today to one of your most beloved hobbies. When you do something you want or choose to do, after all, you feel better and more alive, Peper says. Plus, doing something creative, such as taking a cooking class or playing the piano, can release positive energy and let you view life in a better light, Lombardo says. ■