

How to Maximize Enjoyment & Self-Care Throughout the Winter Season

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It seems like each year the winter season and all of its holiday goodness begins earlier and lasts longer. Naturally, during this time many people may find their mood and motivation dropping with the temperature and day length. With those short days, seem to come a more crowded to-do list: *baking cookies, holiday shopping, parties and social gatherings, house cleaning, last minute work projects, final exams, hosting visitors and families, etc.* With the involvement that the holiday seasons bring, it is all too easy to forget to enjoy what is going on around us, and most importantly taking care of our mental health and ourselves. So our impending question; how do we find those “bright spots,” so to speak, in the winter darkness and how do we keep our motivation and spirits high? Here are some friendly tips to maximize your energy, enjoyment, and self-care this holiday season!

Shift Your Mentality:

During the chilly wintertime, it seems easy to be one of two kinds of people: those who dread the season and everything that comes along with it, and those who are fully immersed in the weather and holiday spirit. For those who fall into holiday dread, the goal is to shift your approach to the winter season so you can engage in and enjoy what is going on around you.

Mental shifting means purposefully adapting your attention from one approach another; or adjusting your perception of your environment. How can we put this into practice this winter? Instead of loathing the cold and brisk outside world, try to appreciate and enjoy the seasonal opportunities that are offered around you. Take an active approach to be present and show gratitude for your environment by gazing at the holiday lights that line your street, appreciating the scent of the warm coffee or hot cocoa on a chilly morning, and savoring those special treats and meals that are carefully prepared only during this season. With the winter season brings the chance for you to create traditions and photo-ops with your family, friends, or by yourself. If you engage with the season, you may just make lasting & pleasing memories.

Connect with Others:

On that 20-degree night, it may be all too easy for us to stay at home, curl up in bed, and call it an early night. Low energy during the wintertime leads people to want to isolate, sleep, and be alone. It is hard to find the motivation to get out of the house and take on the chilly winter days, but it is worth it to try. Being around other people to share a meal, laughter, and love is an important part of feeling positive and connected throughout the darker months of the year. It takes a bit of extra work but putting effort into after-work social routines with friends and family may provide you stimulation and connection to balance out the demands and responsibilities of your work or school day. It also provides you something to look forward to in the evening hours – try to build connections with others once or twice each week to keep your own spirits high.

Find Purpose:

In the wintertime, we may find ourselves in “autopilot” mode. We might go through the motions of school or work with an end goal of just getting through the day, week, or month. How can we escape the “working for the weekend” mentality and shift to the mentality of having productive reasons WHY? Why you are sitting through that two-hour meeting, why you commute an hour to and from work, why you are turning an eight-hour school day into nine hours, etc. If you find a reason and sense of achievement in every decision you are making, you will feel more purposeful, intentional, and accomplished. You will start taking pride and ownership in your daily responsibilities, and suddenly they will not feel like such burdens. Optimize your sense of personal success by approaching all of your schooling, work, and

personal responsibilities with intent, ownership, and pride. You are doing all of these things for a productive reason, so find that reason and embrace your purpose.

Schedule Routine Relaxation Time:

With how scheduled we become during the holidays balancing last minute projects at work, spending quality time with others, hosting/attending social gatherings, cooking, baking, shopping, and bringing in family from out of town, we often forget to schedule time for our own decompression and relaxation. Even if you enjoy the hustle and bustle of the winter season, everyone needs time off to re-energize. Try some of these tips to allow the necessary relaxation time in your daily routine:

- Be assertive – do not be afraid to say “no” to extra opportunities. Do not be timid in asking for help or assistance if you feel like you have too much on your plate, and not enough time to handle it. You can only do so much, so prioritize your schedule and pick-and-choose what is most important for you to manage. Delegate what you can to those willing to pick up the slack!
- Spend a few minutes each day doing nothing, with no agenda.
- Read your favorite book or magazine a little bit each day.
- Try guided meditations via phone apps or YouTube videos.
- Schedule spa time (massages, facials, manicures, etc.).
- Take a drive by yourself to escape a crowded house.
- Think positively about yourself and your life circumstances.
- Wake up 5-10 minutes earlier to peacefully enjoy your morning coffee or breakfast before facing your daily responsibilities.
- Choose to listen to music that will refresh your motivation, optimism, and willingness to take on your days. Whether that is holiday music or not, music can be a very powerful influencer on our moods and mentality.
- Disconnect from your technology and just breathe. It is hard to focus on yourself when your texts, emails, social media accounts, and other notifications are popping up on the lock screen of your phone. It is even harder when that phone is connected to your laptop or smartwatch and you see the same notifications on several interfaces. Put your technology in a separate room and allow yourself to sit in disconnection to the social world while you take deep breaths and refresh your headspace.
- Forward thinking—Remember that spring is on the way & your struggle is only temporary!

The winter season is only what you make it out to be. Happy Holidays from BZA Behavioral Health ☺