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“Keeping Your Mood Up When Mother Nature is Denying Us Our Sunlight”

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It frequently feels like it's more difficult to get yourself going in the mornings during winter time because it's dark when you wake up and dark when you get home from work. The sluggish feeling associated with less sunlight might also be affecting your metabolism and your desire to work out.

Sunlight helps to increase our brain's happy chemicals and also vitamin D level in our body, which helps with our mood and other very important bodily functions. So, how can we get our body to be more efficient and less sluggish when we are seemingly fighting Mother Nature in her quest to keep us in the dark without sunlight? Besides asking our doctors to check our vitamin D levels and supplementing it if we need it, what else can we do?

For those of you who are very much affected by the lack of sun and has seasonal affective disorder, ask your doctor about therapeutic light therapy or sun lamps. For those of you who are not affected to that severity, let's discuss some ways to help our body's metabolism, mood, and energy level improve despite not having as much sunlight in the day.

Our body craves rhythm, so despite it still being dark in the mornings, if you can no longer work out in the morning, try to make sure you work out in the evenings right after work on a consistent basis. If you can try to still work out at your usual time in the mornings, your body will be able to sleep better at nights and your energy level during the day will be better. I generally recommend people to work out in the morning if at all possible so that you can wake up your body and its metabolism, have more energy during the day, and be able to sleep better at night. I usually notice that people eat healthier and make smarter choices in regards to food as well if they work out in the mornings.

Another thing to make sure you do more consistently during the winter time to keep your mood elevated is to set aside time for enjoyable activities. Having something to look forward to will help your mood and help you de-stress. Incorporating time with friends and family who you enjoy their company could also be extremely beneficial in de-stressing and improving your mood. You may want to combine time with your loved ones with exercise by finding physically-active activities for everyone to do together. This will help to boost your mood, energy, and metabolism, all in one.

Sometimes, it may be helpful to incorporate calming and relaxing activities like breath work, gentle yoga, pilates, or stretches into your morning and evening routine with relaxing music and scents to ease your body into wakefulness and sleep. These calming routines may help to elevate your mood and help you to de-stress and calm your body in a way where it starts to help you to appreciate the darker and quieter evenings and mornings.

As you start to appreciate these aspects of the winter months more, you may not notice the lack of chirping birds and bright sunlight in the mornings anymore...until Mother Nature decides to be lenient again and give us back our much desired sunlight!

Dr. Julie T. Chen, M.D. an integrative medicine physician who is board-certified in internal medicine and is also fellowship-trained and board-certified in integrative medicine. She has her own medical practice in San Jose, CA, is the medical director of corporation wellness at several Silicon Valley-based corporations, is on several medical expert panels of websites as well as non-profit organizations, is a recurring monthly columnist for several national magazines, and has been featured in radio, TV, newspaper, and magazine interviews. She incorporates many types of healing modalities into her practice including, but is not limited to, medical acupuncture, Chinese scalp acupuncture, clinical hypnotherapy, strain-counterstrain osteopathic manipulations, and biofeedback. To learn more about Dr. Julie, you can check out her website at www.makinghealthyez.com.