



## Supporting your Mental Health through the Changing Seasons

As the seasons change, so may our mood!

We may notice that we are feeling a bit more sluggish as the nights draw in and the days get shorter. It has been proven that the reduction of sunlight amongst other things can have an impact on our day to day. This becomes even more prevalent if we are already susceptible to certain conditions which effect our mood, like bipolar or depression.

Great news though! There are simple things that we can do for ourselves which help and support this change to help prevent these darker, dreary days from getting us down!

At any point during this guide, if you feel you are experiencing these changes and find it difficult to implement the strategies and routines that may help, maybe you need a bit of extra support, please feel free to reach out to us here at Arthur Ellis.



### So, What's the Problem?

One of the biggest questions there is comes from exactly how the link works between the seasons changing and the effect it can have on our moods.

*Does poor sleep and sluggish activity during the day affect people's mental health?*

*Does it increase the chance of mood disorders?*

*Do mood disorders affect people's ability to sleep well and be active during the day?*

*Could this be caused by the clocks changing?*

The answer? Yes, to all!

However, just because you may be feeling slightly sluggish or a little down, this doesn't mean you have a mood disorder or anything too serious is going on. Truth is, most of us experience these changes to differing degrees.

With the clocks changing, this can increase the chances of symptoms relating to depression. Sleep is a trigger for many of us, if we don't get a good night sleep or our sleep pattern changes, we will more than likely be in a bad mood!



We all have a 'body clock' which are also known as 'time encoders' or 'Zeitgebers'. In other words, things that affect the way our body adjusts to changes in time.

The different things that can affect this internal body clock can be;

- Light
- Atmospheric conditions
- Medications
- Temperature
- Social interactions
- Exercise
- Eating/drinking patterns
- Amount and quality of sleep!

## Supporting Ourselves

There are really simple things that we can do ourselves which can help these changes, as we can assume we are probably going to experience changes in some form, we can begin to build these changes into our day to day routine so we can ensure the effects are at a minimum and we adjust into the winter routine smoothly without it having too much of an impact on our mental health.

### Light

As we live in Britain...we can assume that we will be deficient in Vitamin D. Vitamin D is what our body processes from the sun, the majority of us just simply don't get enough of it in this country! This doesn't necessarily mean we need a test to tell us that but what we can do is ensure we up our Vitamin D stores by;

Supplementing Vitamin D with simple, over the counter supplements

Focus on foods which are right in Vitamin D including; Oily Fish, Cereals, Beef Liver, Cheese, Milk and Orange Juice.

Ensure that our light at home is appropriate, as we are getting ready for bed, avoid bright lights and make our 'Home Atmosphere' one that is cosy with warm lighting.





## Our Environment

Our bedroom needs to be a place where we go to sleep, not to go to play computer games or watch TV. This can begin to get us into the unhelpful routine of us naturally thinking 'I'm getting into bed to watch TV' rather than 'I'm going to sleep'.

Make the atmosphere in your bedroom one that is for sleep;

- Make your bed
- Have a clean and tidy room with no distractions in it

## Medication

If you do take medications, be aware of their effects on you. Some medications cause drowsiness, therefore, you may need to adjust the times that you take them, taking them earlier so they have less of an impact on you in the mornings.

If you are struggling to make this change, discuss your medications with your GP. There may be a slightly different type of medication which has less of a sedative effect that you can try over the autumn and winter months.

## Temperature

It can start to get us down a little bit if it's constantly cold outside, so make sure you aren't cold at home! Whether you ramp up the heating or always have a jumper handy. This can add to that comforting feeling. A warm house will also help us to get up in the morning so getting out of that warm bed isn't too much of a battle to get up and about.

Wrapping up warm will also help us to keep those colds at bay as well as keeping us warm throughout the day so we can get out during our lunch breaks because we may not feel overly motivated or may not feel safe to go out in the evenings as the nights draw in!

## Social Interactions

As the seasons change, we may experience a disruption in our usual routine for opportunities to have social interactions with others.

It's important that we recognise this, not just within ourselves but discuss this change with your friends! Be sure to change the typical routine to facilitate to nights drawing in, the changes in weather and get those enjoyable activities arranged ahead of time so they don't drop off, we keep things to look forward to and keep up those social interactions.

If your social interactions are usually outside, look for indoor alternatives. Go out for dinners, maybe start a class or go to educational talks, the theatre etc.



## Exercise

Our exercise is one of the most important things that can help to lift our mood, get that endorphin release our body craves but it can be so easy for this to be disrupted as the seasons change.

Saying that, it can be difficult to get motivated when the seasons change! So, be prepared for that! Adjust how and when you exercise.

If you exercise outside during the evenings, try to find a different type of exercise indoors that you enjoy. If you typically cycle, join a spin class or get yourself a bike holder that suspends your back wheel so you can cycle at home!

Even better would be to change your routine so you're getting your exercise in during the day, in your lunch break or in the morning so you're not missing out of your exercise AND you're getting that boost of your Vitamin D!



## Eating/Drinking Patterns

If the other adjustments to our exercise and sleep aren't implemented, we may start noticing changes in our eating patterns. This could be in the food we eat but it could also be in the times that we are eating.

If its dark in the mornings, it might be quite difficult to want breakfast. If we are trying to catch up and cram things in during the evenings, we may notice that we are eating later and later.

If we aren't getting our endorphins, our food choices could also change, eating more indulgent foods so we get the endorphins that way.

We need to be quite disciplined here and ensure that when we are doing our food shops, we plan out our meals, making sure that we are getting our fruits and vegetables and work as many Vitamin D rich foods into our diets as possible.

To read more about Vitamin D nutrition - <https://www.webmd.com/food-recipes/guide/calcium-vitamin-d-foods>





## Sleep

Sleep is so easily affected and can have a huge impact on our mood. However, as the nights draw in it can be easy to slip into unhelpful habits.

Sleep top tips include;

- Turn your phone off by 10pm and leave it out of your bedroom
- Stop having caffeine at midday
- Yoga or other relaxing exercise
- Relaxation music/podcasts/reading
- Fall asleep to music, sounds or ASMR
- If you haven't fallen asleep within 20 minutes, get out of bed and do something to expend energy

There is some more around sleep hygiene here - <https://www.sleepfoundation.org/articles/sleep-hygiene>

## Supporting Others with the Changing Seasons

Whether it's in a business, in a school or just at home, we need to be aware of the affects the changing seasons can have and plan accordingly.

Don't shy away or ignore this inevitable change, create an open discussion to say how it is influencing you and encourage others to implement these changes.

Ensure people can implement their own personal strategies by making these allowances internally. It could be as simple as being a bit more lenient with lunch breaks so people can be outside more, so they can get their exercise in so when they go home in the evening, they are able to relax and wind down rather than having to fit more and more in during the evenings.

Discuss these changes with your team, see what they struggle with and need individually and bear these changes in mind so you can keep track of it and help them where appropriate.

Something simple like offering adjusted work patterns, being conscious of workload, encouraging and organising social events to make darker afternoons/evenings seem more fun can have a huge impact on your team's mood.

We really encourage you to investigate and implement the strategies that sound right for you. However, if you do feel that you are still struggling, reach out to us. It can be easy for this change in seasons to affect us so think ahead, reach out and get yourself an Arthur Ellis Mentor!

<https://www.arthurellismhs.com/mentoring/>

