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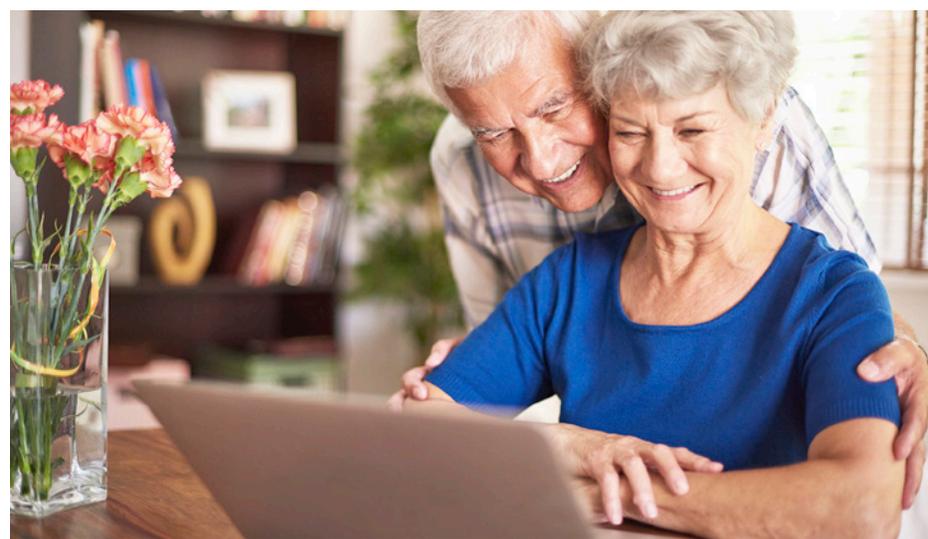


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There are many ways to beat the blues. Simply getting out of the house (weather permitting) could do wonders. How about a stroll around the block?

For those that can't get out of the house, have your children or grandchildren set you up with some electronic devices. You would be amazed what a simple Facetime or Skype conversation with the grandchildren could do.

## Beating the winter blues



**Matt Del Vecchio**  
Seniors and Aging

Fed up of winter? You're not alone. It's that time of year where winter is becoming more challenging to deal with, yet we still have some ways to go before spring brings warmer, sunnier weather. For some, winter is embraced. For others, particularly seniors and caregivers for their loved ones, winter can be agonizingly tough. It can take a toll both physically and mentally.

According to the Canadian Mental Health Association, about 15 percent of the population will suffer from the "winter blues". In more serious cases, approximately 2-3 percent of the population suffer from Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD) which is a type of depression that makes one feel lethargic, moody, irritable and over tired. Energy levels are lowered; it is more difficult to sleep; appetites and weight are affected; and interest in activities are reduced.

The good news is that there are many ways to beat the blues. Here is a list of some recommendations you might want to try:

### Get out!

Simply getting out of the house (weather

permitting) could do wonders. How about a stroll around the block? You might want to see one of the grandkid's activities — a hockey or ringette game, dance class, swimming lessons or karate class. For those that have the time and resources, plan a trip down south. Get yourself involved in some social activities. Join a club or association that interests you. Once you mark an activity in your calendar, you have something to look forward to it and it forces you to get out there.

### I could see the light

It is scientifically proven that increased light will help beat the winter blues. Light can be natural or artificial. The obvious solution is to try to get more natural sunlight. Open up blinds and window coverings. Position chairs closer to windows. Go outside. For those willing to try something different, creating artificial light through a light therapy lamp is becoming more and more accepted. All you need is 30 minutes a day. Light therapy lamps are readily available at many retail outlets, including pharmacies.

### Stay connected

For those that can't get out of the house, have your children or grandchildren set you up with some electronic devices. Once

set up, you would be amazed what a simple Facetime or Skype conversation with the grandchildren could do. Once you gain confidence with the computer, iPad, iPhone, or comparable android device, there is an entire world awaiting you that can help get you through the winter blues. These include online books, games, crosswords, newspapers, magazines and of course, streaming of movies and television shows. Sound too complicated? Bribe your grandchildren with their favourite treat. Cash also works! They are the best teachers. It will also give them a sense of pride that they are actually teaching you something.

### Volunteer

There are countless ways to volunteer. Organizations are constantly looking for help. What's your interest or passion? Why not use your skills for a good cause? Volunteering provides a sense of purpose while benefiting others. Plus, it gets you out of the house. Helping special needs kids; supporting local non-profit organizations; driving seniors to medical appointments; church groups; hospital and palliative care support; and mentorship for entrepreneurs are just a few examples of how you can make a difference.

### Exercise and eat well

I may be stating the obvious, but you would be amazed how winter can affect our ability to exercise and eat well. We find excuses not to go out. We tend to resort to sweets and carbs as comfort food. This will all contribute to the winter blues. Try to commit to a routine schedule of exercising. This could be as simple as the treadmill at home; a walk around the block or a visit to the gym. Make a conscious effort to eat healthy and smart. Consider veggie-filled soups; your favourite salads; hearty, healthy stews; and even frozen fruits and veggies are a suitable alternative to the lack of fresh produce available.

It's time to grind it out. Beating the winter blues takes a little effort and creativity. Apply some of these recommendations and before you know it, you will be heading out to the local garden centre to buy your flowers for spring planting.

*Matt Del Vecchio is a Certified Professional Consultant on Aging (CPCA). He is the founder and president of Lianas, a company specializing in retirement residence search and senior transition support, and co-host of the Life Unrehearsed radio show on CJAD 800 every Sunday at 4 p.m. Matt also writes a regular blog at TheSuburban.com and can be reached at [mdevecchio@lianasservices.com](mailto:mdevecchio@lianasservices.com)*

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