

THE CENTER for CLINICAL MASSAGE

Ken Laymon

Start the new year right!

Renew your commitment to good health

Now that the new year has begun, you may be making resolutions or enjoying the memories of good times at the holidays. No matter what, remember to take good care of yourself during the short days and colder weather of winter.

Honor the moods of winter

Starting with the bustle of the holidays, many people find it hard to stick to their wellness routine. First of all, consider that it makes sense that we humans slow down in the winter. So if you feel the need, honor the inner nudge to restore your resources, fight off a cold or just stay home for a weekend with a good book.

New moves for a new year

To pick up the pace again, look for a fun or new way to get your body moving. If you can't get out to snowshoe or hike on wintry trails, check out indoor activities like climbing walls, swimming with a sauna or hot tub afterward, dance classes such as tango and country swing, or adult competitive sports like volleyball.

Deep breathing

Practicing deep breathing every day is another way to keep both mind and body healthy and relaxed. The cells of the body, from the brain to the muscle tissues, depend on oxygen to function well.

Here is a simple exercise to try. Inhale quietly through your nose to the count of four, then hold your breath for a count of seven. Purse your lips and exhale through your mouth with a whooshing noise for a count of eight. Repeat for a total of four breath cycles. If you feel light-headed, take a break and go back to breathing normally, then try again.



Get yourself moving and lift your mood with ballroom dance classes.

Remember, it doesn't take a big commitment of time or money to take care of yourself this winter. It may help, however, to plan ahead and schedule your favorite self-care activities.

Warm stones, hydrotherapy and more

Bodywork to beat the winter chill

If you're feeling chilled to your bones, help may be just around the corner at your massage therapist's studio. Ask about these warm and nurturing services.

Hot stone massage

Hot stone massage has become a winter favorite in northern climes. In this extraordinary technique, stones heated in water are laid on the back, the hands, the abdomen and other sites to melt away tension and stress. Warm stones are also used as tools to massage into tissues, encouraging gentle release and relaxation.

Warm to the bone

Your massage therapist or day spa may offer a hot tub or sauna to warm you up before your treatment. If not, ask about treatments that include warm foot baths. For sluggish circulation and the seasonal "shivers," receive a massage with warm oil scented with essential oils that improve circulation such as rosemary, pine or tangerine.



Applying warm oil blended with essential oils can increase circulation during the winter months.

Are you SAD?

Bright light and relaxation can help

Most of us feel out of sorts at times during the dark, often cold months of winter. Seasonal affective disorder (SAD) is an extreme form of the winter blues. Studies suggest that the levels of certain brain chemicals that help you feel good can be negatively affected by low light levels during these months.

Could I have SAD?

If you suffer from SAD, you probably feel depressed at times, and have little energy or feel listless. You may feel unable to tolerate stress and have a decreased interest in activities you normally enjoy. SAD can also cause excessive sleepiness, fatigue, carbohydrate cravings, and overeating.



Spending time outside, even on overcast days, can help with symptoms of SAD.

Bright light can help

Light therapy is effective for many people. If you have the time, exercising regularly outside, even on overcast days, can help. For indoor light therapy, you should receive exposure to very bright light an average of 30 minutes to one hour every day. Ordinary bulbs don't do it — the light should be at least ten times the intensity of normal domestic lighting. You may want to try a specially designed "light box." If you have difficulty finding one of these light therapy units in your area, there are many reputable sources advertising on the internet.

What else can I do?

Psychological counseling helps many people. Massage therapy can also help you cope with the effects of SAD by increasing relaxation, reducing the effects of stress and offering a time and place to receive nurturing support.



Turn your face to the sun and the shadows fall behind you.

—Maori proverb