



Winter Blues Got You Down? Some Tips to Help You Get Through

Six tips by Fred Hutch for patients and caregivers who are hoping to feel more energized this winter season.

January 4, 2026 By Fred Hutch News Service and Elizabeth Darlington

Whether you are from the Seattle area or are just in town for proton therapy, you can't miss that it's getting dark outside very early in the day. Seattle is one of the northernmost cities in the contiguous United States, which means that winters are darker, and days are shorter than most of the country.

Add to that, there's a lot of rain in Seattle this time of year.

Many people in the Pacific Northwest enjoy winter because it's a great time to cozy up indoors and settle in with a good book or a warm cup of tea. But for others, the winter gray and wet can be challenging in terms of mental health.

Here are some tips for patients and caregivers who are hoping to feel more energized this winter season:

Lighten up: To lift your mood, try to get natural light as soon after you wake up as possible, as well as throughout the day. Of course, this is challenging when it's dark in the morning, but an inexpensive indoor sun lamp can be very helpful in fighting [Seasonal Affective Disorder](#), or SAD. Then, head outside later in the day, even if it's just for a short while. Your body — and mood — will thank you for the extra Vitamin D.

Get moving: Movement can also improve your mood. People often wait until they feel like moving, but on a wet and chilly day, that might mean waiting all day! In fact, people need to just move first to feel better. Try turning on music and doing some gentle stretching or dancing indoors. Chair yoga is also an effective and safe way to get some movement.

Breathe deep: Breathing exercises are a great way to both feel more grounded and to boost energy, especially a breathing exercise called the "physiological sigh." Take a deep breath in, followed by a shorter "sip-like" breath, and then exhale slowly. Alternatively, you can make your second inhale even deeper than the first, whichever one feels good to you. This can be particularly restorative and also help with anxiety.

Take time for you: Find time to practice self-care, whatever that means to you. Self-care can involve doing things you love, but it can be as simple as checking in with yourself and your own body — what is it telling you? What emotions are coming up? What thoughts? What can you do to be kinder to yourself? This habit can take a lot of practice and patience. Sometimes, your body needs to rest, sometimes to vent, sometimes to cry. In this way, you are caring for yourself in the moment.

Set a timer! Much as this idea may seem silly, timers can be a great way to incorporate new habits. You can set a timer to remind yourself to drink water, to do some deep breathing, to get up from your spot and move a little bit, or to check in with yourself.

Don't forget to ask for help: Sometimes, cancer forces us to act in ways that we aren't used to. If you've always been an independent person, it can be hard to do, but alleviating your burden can be especially important during the dark, wet, chilly part of the year. Seek support in as many ways as possible, from friends and family if available, or by calling on our social workers.

Fred Hutch's social workers are here to help provide emotional support to patients and caregivers, and to connect with community resources for mental health as well as practical concerns. Do not hesitate to ask our [patient navigator team](#) to put you in contact with the social work department or call [206.606.1076](tel:206.606.1076).

Remember, all feelings are valid. Having a cancer diagnosis or being a caregiver for someone with cancer is hard and can be especially so this time of year. You may have heard the phrase "feel your feelings." This just means that anything you are feeling is okay, even if that's grief, annoyance or anger.

Naming that feeling and allowing yourself to lean into it helps you to move through it. Eventually, the strong emotions will shift, and often people feel some relief. Be gentle, non-judgmental and compassionate with yourself.

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