

# Ebel: Find Winter-time Wellness During Short Days

Joe Ebel, Guest Columnist    Published 11:49 a.m. ET Jan. 13, 2019

The holidays are over, it's dark by the time you get home from work, and it's cold and dreary outside. These factors can contribute to negative mental and physical health impacts from increased depression, seasonal affective disorder, reduced physical activity, more screen time, less time outdoors, increased snacking, and weight gain.

In January, health clubs and fitness centers are packed with well-intentioned people trying to lose those holiday pounds or reach a new year's resolution to get into shape, but by March many have given up on their lofty goals. While fitness centers are a great fit for many people, making changes in diet and lifestyle have longer lasting impacts for most of us.

But take heart, now that we are into a new year, the days are actually starting to get longer. Moving from only 9 hours and 21 minutes of daylight at the end of December toward our peak of 15 hours in mid-June. The change is only a couple of minutes a day, but small changes add up to brighter days.

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We can follow the same model that by adopting small changes, a lasting foundation of healthy choices can be maintained all year long.

Some winter-time wellness ideas:

- Setting a limit on screen time and avoid the temptation to just plop onto the couch and binge watch TV for an unlimited amount of time.
- Making a plan to get outside more. Wear layers with a hat and gloves, grab a flashlight and take a walk after dinner. Avoid really cold, windy days. Most January and February days reach high 30's, where you can still break a sweat during a brisk walk.
- Plan your meals to try new healthier recipes and only buy healthy snacks.
- Set a bed time. For most adults we should be getting at least 7 hours, but no more than 9 hours of sleep each night. For teens, the CDC recommends 8 to 10 hours each night, and for 6 to 12-year old's they recommend 9 to 12 hours of sleep per 24 hours.
- Keep a log of your physical activities each day and build on your successes. If you went for a 10-minute walk each day last week, try for 15 minutes this week.
- Avoid smoking and breathing in other people's smoke. If you smoke, call the Licking County Community Cessation Initiative at (866) 525-2132 for free quitting help and referrals.
- Winter is a prime time for spreading disease, stay healthy by getting a flu shot and washing your hands regularly.
- Travel safely, slow down, don't drink and drive, wear your seat belt every time you drive or ride in a car, and always buckle your child in a safety seat, booster seat, or seat belt appropriate for their age, height, and weight.
- Maintain close relationships all year long, not just at the holidays. Getting and giving support to family and friends and spending time with others who care about you can help keep stress down and maintain a positive outlook.

If the winter blues have you down, remember, the days are getting longer, and before you know it, we will be complaining about how hot it is. Reach out for help when needed and keep building healthy habits - with brighter days to come.

*Submitted by Licking County Health Commissioner, Joe Ebel, R.S., M.S., M.B.A.*

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