Here’s how to sing a happier tune this year.

The Northwest has had a couple of long winters in the last few years. You might have heard stories in the news or from neighbors about damage done to houses by the snow. But what about winter’s effect on mental health? As you head into cold-weather season, considering how winter affects your mindset can help you prepare for the changes.

When it’s darker and colder outside, it can be more challenging to do things you normally do to reduce stress, such as taking walks. Decreased sunshine can cause you to feel more gloomy and lethargic than usual, commonly known as the “winter blues.” If this mood shift begins to affect your whole life, though, you might have a form of depression called seasonal affective disorder (SAD). This kind of depression occurs at roughly the same time every year and may interfere with your daily life.

Symptoms of SAD may include:

- Noticeable loss of joy and interest in your favorite activities
- Changes in sleep or appetite
- Feeling sad, worthless, or guilty
- Troublesome thoughts about death or suicide

There are effective treatments for SAD, including getting more natural sunlight or artificial light therapy, talk therapy, and antidepressant medications. Exercise, one of nature’s best antidepressants, can also boost your mood effectively. Being open with your doctor can help them to know how to partner with you in designing a helpful treatment plan.

Another way to combat the winter blues and SAD is to remain as social as possible. People who are depressed benefit greatly from interacting with others, even when not feeling very enthusiastic about socializing. Whether it’s spending time with someone who is a good listener or helping a neighbor with a project, you might find comfort and encouragement in reaching out to others.

If you dread winter because of related mood changes you’ve experienced in the past, know that you don’t have to suffer. Help is available, and even small steps can make a big difference. For more information on coping with depression (including SAD), visit Tinyurl.com/y4hvqcym.

Learn more about our Condition Support program: yoursupport@pacificsource.com or (888) 987-5805.
The Power to Be Prepared

Natural disasters can happen any time, so preparing for your health in the event of an emergency makes sense. Yet according to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), 48% of Americans don’t have even a simple emergency kit at home.

What natural disasters can happen in our region? Wildfires, floods, earthquakes, and severe winter weather with power outages are real threats. However, you have the power to be prepared, keeping you and your family as healthy and safe as possible if a natural disaster strikes.

Would you and your family be prepared to handle a sudden disaster, long-term power outage, or loss of water? If not, here are some resources to empower you to prepare.

Build a Kit and Keep It Updated

At a minimum, have these basic supplies available in an emergency kit. Keep the kit in an easy-to-find location in your home in a plastic sealed tub (for home), or a backpack or carry-on luggage (for evacuation situations). Add some reflective tape to your kit, so you can find it easily in a power outage.

- **Water.** Have at least a three-day supply—one gallon of water per person, per day. Store commercially purchased water in its original sealed container in a cool, dark place. For more information on safe drinking water, go to: Ready.gov/water.

- **Food.** Store enough shelf-stable food for all household members for at least three days. Consider any special dietary needs, and don’t forget your pets. Include what you’ll need to prepare and serve meals, such as a manual can opener, plates, cups, and eating utensils. For more information on what foods to have on hand and food safety, go to: Ready.gov/food.

- **Medications and supplies.** Have at least a seven-day supply of prescription medications and any supplies. Remember prescription eyeglasses, hearing aids, canes, and over-the-counter medications, such as pain relievers and allergy medications.

- **Health protection supplies,** such as toilet paper, feminine hygiene products, insect repellent, a first aid kit, hand sanitizer, sunscreen, and blankets.

- **In case of a power outage** have some flashlights, a battery operated or hand-crank radio, and extra batteries. Print out and keep a copy of the “Power Outage Checklist” from the Red Cross (see Resources) with your emergency items.

- **Important personal documents** you might need include a list of current medications and medical information, proof of address, and a list of family and emergency contact information.

Update your supplies every six months. Remove, use, and replace food and water, medications, and supplies before they expire.

Make a Plan and Review It Regularly

What should you do in case of a fire, earthquake, or evacuation? Both the CDC and the American Red Cross provide excellent resources. Discuss with your family and make a plan for how to respond to emergencies. Determine responsibilities for each member of the family and discuss how you will work as a team. Review the plan and practice it periodically.

Resources:

Start here for information on planning for any type of emergency. This website is supplied by the Department of Homeland Security: Ready.gov

“Be Red Cross Ready,” an emergency preparedness checklist and planning document (pdf): Tinyurl.com/y28dq8yf

Red Cross “Power Outage Checklist” (pdf): Tinyurl.com/y28s5crn
Momentum through Accountability

Life can change in a heartbeat, as the saying goes. Lucy, while working at a hospital last October, unexpectedly and suddenly suffered a ruptured brain aneurysm. Fortunately, she received immediate help, which likely saved her life. She left the hospital on the road to recovery, along with new diagnoses of type 2 diabetes and high blood pressure.

The whole unnerving experience was a wake-up call for a self-identified type A personality, and further motivation came from the fact that strokes run in her family. She began making changes in many areas of her life, including physical activity, nutrition, and stress reduction. It was an ideal time to build healthy habits, since she had time off for her recovery.

How Our Program Helped

In a word, accountability. When Lucy joined PacificSource’s Condition Support program soon after her hospitalization, her initiative had already taken her far. She had lost 12 pounds by going to the gym regularly, cutting back on processed carbs, and watching portions. Meditation apps also helped her manage stress.

In addition, Lucy had just completed a four-week diabetes education class, where she had felt accountable to her fellow classmates and teachers. She wanted to keep the momentum going, and she knew outside accountability was vital. That’s where our program came in.

Moving Forward with Confidence

To make sure her changes were sustainable, Lucy has continued to grow and hone her habits. “If I fall off the wagon in one area, so many other areas of success help me get back on track,” she says. Phone check-ins help, and she is already thinking ahead, looking for an existing support group or creating one of her own, because accountability continues to keep her committed to her goals.

Special Considerations for those with Diabetes

Injection supplies. For insulin and other injectables, pack extra syringes and vials and/or insulin pens and needles, and a protective container for sharps disposal. Alcohol wipes are handy if you can’t wash your hands. Rotate through your emergency insulin supply to use it before it expires. Because injectables need to be kept cool, pack a Frio case or keep gel packs in freezer. Tape a note to the top of your emergency kit to remind yourself to grab your insulin and gel packs on the way out the door.

Insulin pump alternative. If you use a pump, in addition to storing cartridges, infusion sets, prep wipes, batteries, and charger, consider having a backup method of insulin delivery and long-acting insulin to replace your total basal units. Insulin pens are a convenient, accurate alternative. You’ll need disposable needles for the pens.

In case of lows, pack sources of fast-acting glucose, such as glucose tablets, gels, or drinks, and a glucagon kit. Carry some on your person to have immediate access.

A blood glucose meter. Along with a meter, pack a lancing device, lancets, alcohol swabs, test strips, control solution, and extra batteries. Continuous glucose monitor users will want extra sensors and transmitter.
Disaster-Friendly Recipe: No-Cook Oatmeal

This recipe can easily be adjusted to suit your tastes and the ingredients in your emergency kit.

Ingredients:
- 2 cups instant oats
- ¼ cup nuts or seeds (sliced almonds, sunflower seeds)
- ¼ cup dried fruit (raisins, cranberries)
- 2 cups shelf-stable 1% milk (or shelf-stable nondairy milk)

Directions:
Mix together the ingredients and let stand at least 10 minutes or until thick.

Serves 4.

Nutrition Facts per Serving
(using almonds, raisins, and low-fat, shelf-stable cow’s milk)

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