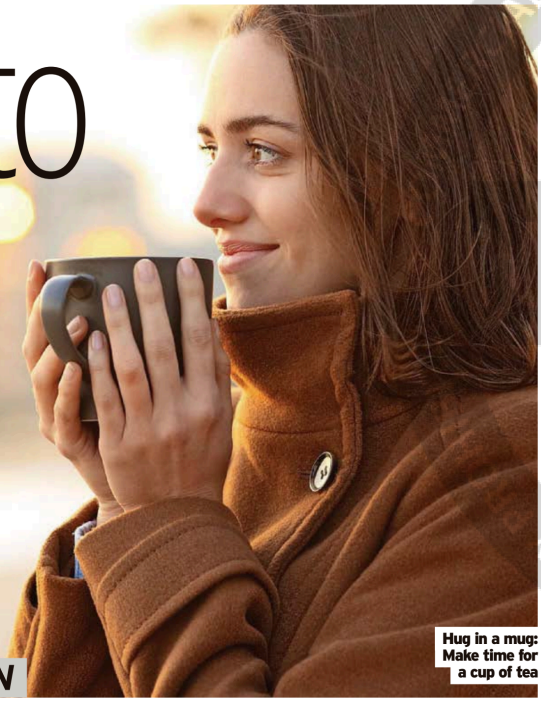
- Psychophysiology / Mind and body

Health & Lifestyle

10 ways to beat the gloom



Hug in a mug: Make time for a cup of tea

THESE QUICK BOOSTS CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE, SAYS ***ABI JACKSON***

IF YOUR mojo (and bank balance) are depleted now Christmas is over and you have the January blues – fear not. Here are 10 easy ideas for a quick mood-boost to help keep your spirits up until February...

1. MAKE A FEW FUN PLANS

"Many of us feel exhausted before the new year has even started, because our body can already energetically predict what to expect," says international speaker and life coach Simon Alexander Ong, bestselling author of Energize.

"Cold, dark days without Christmas lights; returning to work; the pressures that can come with the beginning of a new year...

"To make January more energising, inject fun and novelty into it, so that you have something to look forward to. Even better if the experience is something you haven't done before."

2. GET OUTSIDE IN THE MORNING (EVEN IF JUST FOR FIVE MINUTES)

"Getting outside into natural light first thing in the morning with naked eyes (no glasses, sunglasses or contact lens), will set up your body for the day ahead," says Moya Slade, founder of The Nest, 1-2-1 Restorative Women's Retreats (thenestlife.co.uk).

"Morning sunlight on your eyes stimulates serotonin production, a feel-good chemical impacting mood and focus. Throughout the day, as sunlight diminishes, serotonin naturally converts to melatonin, promoting restful sleep. The perfect little boost from nature to help regulate our circadian rhythms"

3. PHONE A FRIEND

"A phone call with a friend can offer a sense of connection that words on a screen simply can't replicate," says Dr Katy James, psychologist and mental health clinical director at Vita Health Group.

"Personal interactions with loved ones trigger the release of the 'love hormone' oxytocin in the brain - known for its role in bonding and relationship-building, as well as stress and anxiety reduction.

"Phone calls also provide the space to share support in real time, reinforcing a sense of belonging and connection – especially important during difficult or isolating times."



Knitting can boost wellbeing

4. DO SOMETHING CRAFTY OR CREATIVE

"Activities like knitting or painting are brilliant for boosting wellbeing. Engaging in crafting and creativity not only offers a productive outlet, but also stimulates your brain, encouraging the release of 'feel-good' chemical, dopamine – this helps enhance mood and foster feelings of accomplishment," says Dr Lisa Turner, emotional resilience and consciousness expert, founder of CETfreedom (cetfreedom.com) and author of Our Conscious Tipping Point. "Tapping into your creative side also gives your brain a chance to focus and unwind as you step into the new year."

5. HAVE A CLEAR-OUT

"Decluttering doesn't have to be overwhelming. Start by tackling one space at a time and make it fun," says Andreea Dumitru, Salvation Army Restyle Editor.

"You can declutter while listening to music or having your favourite series in the background. Use the 'keep, donate, discard' method to sort through items quickly.

"When you're done, take your donation pile to your local Salvation Army shop. You'll clear your home, help others, and start the year with a great feeling."

6. TRY SOME SCANDI 'GOKOTTA'

"The Swedish concept of Gokotta is all about waking up early to enjoy birdsong, and appreciate nature's beauty in a time of stillness," says Catalin Zorzini, founder of Earth.fm – which has hundreds of authentic nature sounds on its website and new mobile app.

"There have been many studies about the mental wellbeing benefits of listening to nature sounds; one study by the National Trust found that birdsong and rustling leaves can increase relaxation by 30%, which was more so than guided meditation recordings."

7. TAKE A COLD SHOWER

"Cold showers stimulate our immune system which is why they have been found to slash the number of days people call in sick to work by 29%.

"Cold showers have been shown to relieve depressive symptoms and even have beauty benefits – if you can't face the whole thing, just by using cold water on the top of your head, you can add shine to your locks," says longevity expert Leslie Kenny (lesliesnewprime.com).

"The trick is to have a hot shower first and then switch to the coldest setting for one minute."

8. DO A GROUP EXERCISE CLASS

"Participating in group exercise combines the physical benefits of the activity with the cognitive enhancement social interaction provides, which is a win-win for wellbeing," says brain expert Natalie Mackenzie (thebraininjurytherapist.co.uk).

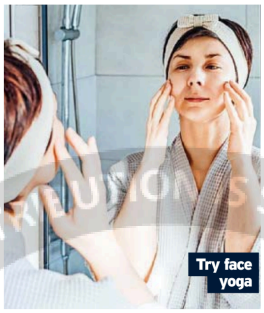
"When we interact during group exercise our brains are stimulated in different ways through conversation, laughing together, and even subtle nonverbal signals.

"Group settings engage different areas of the brain, making it more active and agile, keeping your mental 'muscles' sharp.

"Surrounding yourself with positive people while exercising does wonders for your confidence too, fosters a sense of belonging,



Exercise socially



Try face yoga

> When we interact during group exercise our brains are stimulated in different ways through conversation, laughing together, and even subtle nonverbal signals
>
> Brain expert Natalie Mackenzie

and encourages you to stay motivated."

9. SAVOUR YOUR TEA BREAKS

"Tea is both a natural de-stresser and mood-booster thanks to a cuppa containing polyphenols, which relax and open up the blood vessels which supply the brain, leading to an influx of nutrients and oxygen and L-theanine – which helps us to feel calm and focused at the same time," says Dr Carrie Ruxton, dietician from the Tea Advisory Panel (teaadvisorypanel.com).

"Plus, drinking tea has been found to boost mood, reduce stress and improve concentration. The tea-making ritual also helps us step away from the daily activity, take a breather, and we are rewarded with a hug in a mug."

10. DO SOME FACE YOGA

"A powerful ritual that tones facial muscles, smooths wrinkles, and awakens your inner glow," says Maria Goutine, yoga teacher, Magical Medicine co-founder and certified Ayurvedic Practitioner (HE Dip), who suggests starting your day with some face yoga (there are handy tutorials on YouTube).

"It boosts blood circulation to the head area, delivering fresh oxygen and nutrients to nourish your skin and calm the mind. This practice also activates marma points – energy centres located on the face and head – to balance emotions and alleviate stress.

"Just a few mindful minutes each morning will leave you with radiant skin and a happier, brighter mood all day long."

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