



## MINDING YOUR MENTAL HEALTH THIS WINTER

Just when we thought we had survived the worst of lockdown dismay, we find ourselves faced with a new assault on our mental health: the dreary days of winter. On top of the sadness many of us have dealt with as a result of pandemic restrictions, we could soon face SAD: seasonal affective disorder, the depression that hits many during the winter months.

How can we cope? Some experts believe we can take tips from people who have survived disasters. Here are four lessons you can learn from them to stay stronger this season:

**Look for warning signs.** If you or someone close to you experiences sleep disruptions, irritability, appetite changes or an inability to concentrate for more than a week, your mental health might have slipped beyond unhappiness into depression.

Sources: [scientificamerican.com/article/you-can-get-through-this-dark-pandemic-winter-using-tips-from-disaster-psychology1/](https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/you-can-get-through-this-dark-pandemic-winter-using-tips-from-disaster-psychology1/). Accessed 12/22/2020.  
[fastcompany.com/90584115/4-simple-kind-ways-to-boost-your-mental-health-this-winter](https://www.fastcompany.com/90584115/4-simple-kind-ways-to-boost-your-mental-health-this-winter). Accessed 12/22/2020.

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**Accept anxiety.** We tend to think we're weak if we feel anxious about our circumstances, but anxiety is not the problem ... ignoring anxiety is. Acknowledge and address your stress. Burying it will only make things worse.

**Seek connection.** Sure, connecting with others has been an ongoing struggle this year, but now is the time to get even more creative and determined about feeding our relationships. Survivors of disaster have often dealt with their feelings of loss by reaching out.

**Pay attention to yourself.** Don't stress about what might happen tomorrow. Instead, focus on how you are feeling now. Create strength and contentment in this moment, and you'll be better equipped to confront what's next.

## Smart Facts

**10 MILLION**

Americans are affected by Seasonal Affective Disorder.

**80%**

of people with Seasonal Affective Disorder are women.

**30**

minutes of daily exercise can help prevent depression.

Sources: [dailyorange.com/2017/01/seasonal-affective-disorder-affects-many-individuals-in-cold-climates-but-these-tips-and-tricks-just-might-help-defeat-the-cabin-fever/](https://www.dailyorange.com/2017/01/seasonal-affective-disorder-affects-many-individuals-in-cold-climates-but-these-tips-and-tricks-just-might-help-defeat-the-cabin-fever/)  
[twitter.com/HopkinsMedicine/status/54313358889639936](https://twitter.com/HopkinsMedicine/status/54313358889639936).



## THE COVID VACCINE: THE BEGINNING OF COVID'S END

With the media offering near-constant images of people getting COVID-19 vaccinations, we are finally seeing light at the end of our long, dark pandemic tunnel. The challenge now is making sure we recognize that the light we see is still off in the distance for most of us.

With the approval of vaccines from a number of drug makers and a process in place for distributing those vaccines, it seems likely that, by mid-year, nearly everyone will have access to the anti-COVID shots.

This roll out is impressive, but it's also raised concern among some people who worry about how quickly the drug was developed and distributed. However, the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has been adamant that no corners were cut when it comes to safety. In fact, special measures have been put into place to monitor vaccinations and ensure that there are no problems.

By now, you likely know the basic facts about the vaccination: It is a two-shot process that protects you from COVID-19. Some side effects have been documented, but most people feel little more than some soreness at the injection site and minor flu-like symptoms. While the shot is free to everyone, some providers might charge an administrative fee for providing the vaccines. However, even that likely will be covered by health insurance.

Manufacturers and public health leaders fully expect the vaccines to be effective against COVID-19 and, therefore, to bring an end to the pandemic, they also caution us that protection against the virus isn't instantaneous. It will take months to vaccinate everyone, and people who receive the vaccine should be aware that it could take a couple of weeks before it is fully protecting them.

As a result, the public is being cautioned to continue to practice the now-familiar anti-COVID safety measures for the foreseeable future. We should continue to wear masks in public, limit our circle of contacts, maintain six feet between us, wash hands frequently, and stay away from people who show symptoms of COVID-19.

Finally, experts say that it's unclear whether people who contracted COVID-19 will be protected from future infections or for how long, so they suggest that everyone should get the vaccine, even if you already had the COVID virus.



*"People who receive the vaccine should be aware that it could take a couple of weeks before it is fully working to protect them."*

Sources: [cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/faq.html](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/faq.html). Accessed 12/22/2020.  
[cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/8-things.html](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/8-things.html). Accessed 12/22/2020.  
[mayoclinic.org/coronavirus-vaccine/art-20484859](https://www.mayoclinic.org/coronavirus-vaccine/art-20484859). Accessed 12/22/2020.



# THE EAP: UNDERUTILIZED AND PACKED WITH BENEFITS

Have you ever stressed about your finances, struggled with parenting challenges or simply felt overwhelmed at work, and wished you had someone you could talk to without spending an arm and a leg for a counselor or therapist? Or has someone in your family faced addiction, depression or other serious mental health issues, and you haven't known where to turn?

You probably have a resource that can help you with those kinds of situations *free of charge*, but you either don't realize it or have failed to take advantage of it.

Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs) are designed to meet challenges that workers face at work or beyond the workplace. Provided by employers to help employees deal with everyday stress, mental health challenges and other needs, EAPs give you a direct connection to experts. Plus, the connections are completely confidential . . . no one even needs to know you're using the EAP except you.

Here are some of the issues EAPs commonly help employees address:

- financial matters
- legal questions
- career challenges
- personal and family counseling
- stress management
- day care crises
- stress, grief, depression or other mental health problems
- caring for aging parents
- alcohol or substance abuse
- work conflicts

But don't think you have to be in the middle of a full-blown crisis to tap into these resources. According to the Society of Human Resource Management website, EAPs also help employees with matters like wedding planning, preparing for a new baby or even vacation planning.

The best part? These services are provided free of charge because your employer pays for it, typically as part of your benefits program. Why? Certainly out of concern for employees, but also because employers know that employees are more productive when they have fewer distractions.

How can you make use of these services? It starts by simply educating yourself about your company's EAP. You likely receive information about it every year with your benefits package, but you certainly can contact your HR team to learn more. From there, it's typically simply a matter of calling a phone number or going to a website, where you'll explain your needs and be connected to someone who can help. It's that easy.

Sources: [tasb.org/services/hr-services/hrx/compensation-and-benefits/getting-the-most-out-of-your-eap.aspx](https://tasb.org/services/hr-services/hrx/compensation-and-benefits/getting-the-most-out-of-your-eap.aspx). Accessed 12/22/2020.  
[shrm.org/resourcesandtools/hr-topics/benefits/pages/under-used-eaps-are-a-missed-opportunity.aspx](https://shrm.org/resourcesandtools/hr-topics/benefits/pages/under-used-eaps-are-a-missed-opportunity.aspx). Accessed 12/22/2020.



## National Cervical Health Awareness Month

Each year more than 13,000 women are diagnosed with invasive cervical cancer and more than 4,200 die from the disease . . . and nearly every one of those lives could have been saved through prevention, detection and treatment. Learn more at [preventcancer.org/event/cervical-health-awareness-month-2021/](https://preventcancer.org/event/cervical-health-awareness-month-2021/)

# HARVEST OF THE MONTH: BRUSSELS SPROUTS

Gauging by restaurant menus, cooking websites and Millennials' kitchens, you would be forgiven if you thought brussels sprouts only recently emerged from the ground for the first time. After all, the little green clusters have become one of the hottest U.S. dining trends in recent years.

The truth is, brussels sprouts have been all the rage in Europe for centuries. Thought to have been first cultivated in Rome, they became especially popular as a vegetable crop in Belgium (therefore their name) in the 1500s, and first came to North America in the early 19th century.

Despite their popularity, brussels sprouts are still ranked as the nation's most hated vegetable . . . which is a shame because they do provide a lot of nutritional value. They're especially high in vitamins C and K, and they're packed with other nutrients.

If you're looking to buy the best brussels sprouts, FoodPrint.org suggests that you choose bright-green sprouts with compact heads that show no sign of dulling or wilting. Avoid any that have little pinholes in them, because that's a sign that pests might have invaded them.

You can keep sprouts in the refrigerator for a couple of weeks if they're on the stalk, or a week off of the stalk. They can be frozen, but they should be blanched beforehand.



Source: [foodprint.org/real-food/brussels-sprouts/#:~:text=Brussels%20sprouts%20are%20thought%20to,name%20they%20still%20carry%20today](http://foodprint.org/real-food/brussels-sprouts/#:~:text=Brussels%20sprouts%20are%20thought%20to,name%20they%20still%20carry%20today). Accessed 12/21/2020.



## Recipe: Roasted Brussels Sprouts with Garlic

### Ingredients:

- 1 pint brussels sprouts (about a pound)
- 4 to 6 tbsp extra virgin olive oil (to coat bottom of the pan)
- 5 cloves garlic, peeled
- Salt and pepper to taste
- 1 tbsp balsamic vinegar

### Directions:

Heat oven to 400 degrees. Trim bottom of Brussels sprouts, and slice each in half top to bottom. Heat oil in cast-iron pan over medium-high heat until it shimmers; place sprouts in one layer, cut side down, in pan. Add garlic, and sprinkle with salt and pepper. Cook, undisturbed, until sprouts begin to brown on bottom, and then transfer to oven. Roast, shaking pan every 5 minutes, until sprouts are quite brown and tender, about 10 to 20 minutes. Taste, and add more salt and pepper if necessary. Stir in balsamic vinegar, and serve hot or warm.

### Nutrition Information:

CALORIES: 208; FAT: 17G; CARBS: 12G; FIBER: 4G; SODIUM: 322MG;  
SUGAR: 3G; PROTEIN: 4G

Source: [cooking.nytimes.com/recipes/1890-roasted-brussels-sprouts-with-garlic](http://cooking.nytimes.com/recipes/1890-roasted-brussels-sprouts-with-garlic). Accessed 12/21/2020.