

Happiness secrets from cold-weather countries!

The dark days and nights of winter mean depression for 10 million Americans. Here's some advice from people who live like this most of the year

If now, the darkest time of the year, gets you down, imagine what it's like in a country like Sweden or Norway, where the sun doesn't shine for weeks on end.

But surprisingly, studies show these are actually the

happiest countries in the world! Turns out they've spent generations learning the best ways to beat the winter blues known as SAD (seasonal affective disorder), and have come up with some very effective secrets to shine all season long!

1 Turn up the watts!

Thanks to a slew of new studies showing that bright light can completely eliminate the winter blahs, many Scandinavian spas now feature high-wattage "light rooms," where people sit to feel happier fast.

◆ **LIGHT-UP-YOUR-LIFE-TRICK:** Studies show that spending just 15 minutes near an assortment of lamps with 100-watt bulbs or higher can do the trick.



2 Soak those blues away!

Most people in Finland have a sauna that they use at least once a week to boost their mood and relax.

◆ **LIGHT-UP-YOUR-LIFE-TRICK:** Studies show long hot baths can do the trick just as well! "Like the heat in a sauna, the warm water relaxes your muscles and lowers your blood pressure," explains wellness expert Debbie Mandel, who adds that you can supercharge your soak by tossing in a cup of steeped chamomile, a proven de-stresser. "Just a teabag's worth is plenty!"



Tip!

No time to sit and soak? Ten minutes in a hot shower (it should be hot enough that the bathroom gets steamy) banishes tension just as effectively, says Mandel.

Photos: L. Mancini; Peter Griffith/Masterfile; Jerzyworks/Masterfile; Robert George Young/Masterfile; Larry Williams/Masterfile; Corbis; Dynamic Graphics/PictureQuest (2).



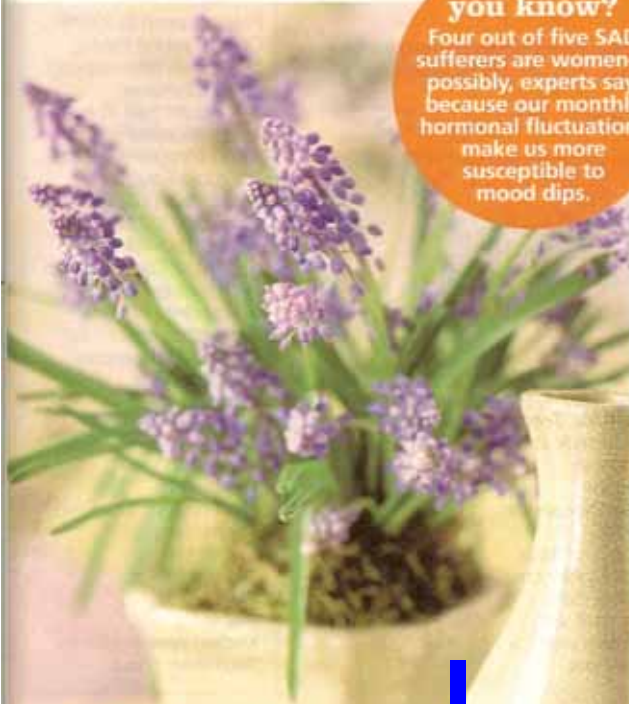
3 Go with the flow!

In Oulu, Finland, the little town just outside the Arctic Circle where Maarit Bystedt grew up, "folks know from experience that the best way to fight cabin fever is to simply sit back and make yourself comfy indoors," she says.

● **LIGHT-UP-YOUR-LIFE-TRICK:** Whenever the gloom outside starts to get you down, just light a few candles, put on some music, pour yourself a glass of red wine or a cup of hot chocolate—and let the winds roar!

Did you know?

Four out of five SAD sufferers are women—possibly, experts say, because our monthly hormonal fluctuations make us more susceptible to mood dips.



4 Bring in some spring!

It's the rare home in Scandinavia where you don't see fresh-cut flowers all winter long. "Women there buy them to perk themselves up," says Townson University's Eva Caughey, who hails from Oslo, Norway. Research shows floral scents boost mood!

● **LIGHT-UP-YOUR-LIFE-TRICK:** Don't want to splurge for a weekly bouquet? "Tuck a few spring bulbs around the edges of your indoor plants," suggests Mandel. Each new green shoot that pokes through will remind you that warmer weather is just around the corner.

5 Celebrate anything!

Ever notice that winter rarely bothers you 'til after the holidays? That's because we're too busy during December to get

blue, says Mandel, who notes that many of our elaborate Christmas traditions come from Scandinavia, where the long dark season inspired people to find ways to liven things up.

● **LIGHT-UP-YOUR-LIFE-TRICK:** Make January and February jollier, too, by planning a girl's night out or President's Day party.



6 Take your vitamin!



Folks in the Far North take spoonfuls of cod liver oil every day in the winter months—and with good reason, says nutritionist Kaayla Daniel, Ph.D., C.C.N. It's the best source of vitamin D—a vitamin linked with higher levels of the feel-good brain chemical serotonin and depression-fighting omega-3s.

● **LIGHT-UP-YOUR-LIFE-TRICK:** You can get the benefits of both vitamin D and omega-3s by taking 1,000 IU-cod liver oil capsules daily.

7 Brighten your corner!

It's no accident that Scandinavian interiors tend to be light and bright, says psychiatrist and pioneering SAD researcher Norman E. Rosenthal, M.D., author of *Winter Blues*. "People who live near the Arctic Circle have learned to capture every available ray of sunlight by painting their walls white or light colors and choosing light-colored furniture and carpeting."

● **LIGHT-UP-YOUR-LIFE-TRICK:** Use cheery color accents like yellow or orange throw pillows to add warmth, and hang a mirror in any spot that could use some brightening, he says.



Do you feel sad in the summer?

It's not just winter that can trigger a bout of seasonal blues; there's also a summer variety, caused by too much light and heat. In China,

more folks get SAD during the warm months—probably, researchers say, because there's so little air conditioning there!

—Barbara Hustedt Crook