Blue Monday: 5 Tips for Happiness and Wellbeing While WFH this Winter

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Blue Monday is upon us!

For those unfamiliar with this turn-of-phrase, "Blue Monday" is commonly considered the saddest day of the year. It's been long enough since December for Christmas cheer to have worn off, yet there is little prospect of Winter's dark and cold grasp loosening any time soon. Add to this the bills racked up from Christmas generosity, and the fact that most of our New Year's resolutions have already failed, and it is little surprise that we tend to feel a little more "blue" than usual today. This may be particularly true this year, as we share the sinking feeling of being back in lockdown-lite, with COVID infections rife and instructions to "work from home" still in place.

Of course, depending on the nature and extent of your feelings, you may be suffering from more than mere Blue Monday blues. For some people, struggles with mental health such as depression or anxiety will constitute a "disability" under the Equality Act 2010. A condition will amount to a disability if it is a physical or mental impairment which has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on the ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities. While there are many aspects to this definition, it is important to be aware that for a condition to be "long term" it needs to have lasted, or be expected to last, for at least 12 months.

Employers are under a proactive duty to make reasonable adjustments for disabled workers to avoid the disadvantage caused by their disability in the workplace. For mental health issues, this duty arises irrespective of whether the impairment was caused by work or by an external factor.

Even for workers not suffering from mental health impairments, January can be a bleak month. It is important that we all do as much as we can to protect our own (or our employees) health and wellbeing during this time. With this in mind we have put together a few tips for keeping your spirits up while working from home this winter:

1. **Get properly dressed before starting work each morning.** We all loved the rush that comes from joining a Zoom meeting with a smart-shirt on show and a pair of pyjamas hidden below the camera lens, but, in truth, a pair of jeans or similar will help most of us feel more motivated and ready to face the day.
2. **Make sure you are walking.** We are all aware of the seemingly unattainable target of 10,000 steps a day. It is particularly difficult this month where it is dark by 4pm, and many of us are working from home. But walking is extremely beneficial for our health and wellbeing (and cannot be substituted by a trip to the gym!). Try and build a walk-a-day into your routine – even if it's only for 15 minutes.
3. **Slow down.** January is a month where we are all trying to achieve a lot, both at work and in our personal lives. Make sure you are taking moments for yourself. Meditation isn't for everyone (it's not for me!) but you can still take time for you. One simple tip is to leave your phones behind (work and personal) when making a cup of tea or coffee. Use those few minutes to check-in with yourself, watch the kettle boil, try and settle your racing mind. Trust me, most things can wait 5 minutes!
4. **Reduce screen time.** The cold and dark of January, and the fact that we are still largely working from home, inevitably increases our (already excessive) screen time. The first thing most of us probably do in the morning is check our phones. Then we sit in front of our computer screens working all day. Exhausted after dinner we will probably flop in front of the TV. Make sure you

are finding some time each day to disconnect from your screens, whether that be going to the gym, cooking dinner in the evening or sitting and talking to those you live with.

5. **DON'T PUT TOO MUCH PRESSURE ON YOURSELF!** January is hard enough without self-flagellation for being the same person you were in 2021. We would all like to see some self-improvement this year, whether that be progressing in our careers, being healthier, or being happier – but this doesn't need to start and end with success in January. Have patience, set yourself achievable goals and if all goes wrong remind yourself… no one expects you to be or feel perfect all of the time.

Remember, these are just a few personal tips for combatting Blue Monday blues. If you believe you are suffering from more serious mental health issues please speak to your doctor.

If you would like to discuss any issues relating to the content of this article, please contact Rebecca Rubin (rebeccarubin@bdbf.co.uk), or your usual BDBF contact.

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