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Integrating Natural Sunlight into Your Indoor Space

The Arctic Winters in Quebec can be very difficult for many. Along with the colder temperature, the days are also getting shorter and many of us experience a mood shift and a decrease of energy during this time, which is a phenomenon also known as the winter blues, or, in more serious cases, seasonal affective disorder ("SAD"). In fact, about 15% of Canadians experience the winter blues, while about 2-3% of them experience SAD ¹. Moreover, women and young adults ages 18 to 30 are more likely to suffer from SAD than men and older adults, respectively. The primary culprit of both the winter blues and SAD is the lower level of natural sunlight we are exposed to daily. In fact, a lower amount in natural light can lead to a dip in serotonin (hormone for mood regulation), disruptions in circadian rhythms (control for sleep/wake cycle) and changes in melatonin (hormone for both mood and sleep). When our mood shifts due to these factors, it can also affect our work performance and our personal relationships. Therefore, it is important to make sure to maximize our exposure to natural light during the colder season, as a large number of researches have demonstrated its effectiveness in alleviating SAD symptoms ². To do so, you can use either artificial or natural light therapy, as both have been proven to be very efficient; however, the first represents a method that is more costly and requires a bunch of research prior to the treatment. Instead, through a few simple and easy home improvements, you can brighten your indoor space instantaneously to enlighten your mood and reduce, at the same time, your exposure to the health risks of fluorescent light bulbs.



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1. Mirror, mirror, on the wall ...



The first tip is to strategically use mirrors to reflect sunlight. In fact, when they are placed adjacent to a window, they catch the angle of light and bounce it throughout the room. This can help a room feel brighter and larger than it really is. Capturing natural lighting and projecting it into those darker corners of the room will have an immediate effect of brightening the space.

The second tip is to leverage the mirror effect by decorating a room with items that have reflective surfaces, such as metallic or glassy pieces of art (think of a glass coffee table, a crystal chandelier or a gold floor lamp). You can find a wide selection of affordable, unique and high-quality vintage pieces of home decor at your local second-hand stores. Your wallet, your home, your well-being, and the Earth will thank you for that!



2. Say goodbye to heavy curtains

The next tip is to ditch heavy curtains and use, instead, sheer and translucent ones. Beyond the polished and modern aesthetics of sheer curtains, opting for these in your bedroom will filter the natural light entering your room in the morning, enabling the sun to be your natural alarm clock, setting your circadian rhythm back on track and rebooting your sleeping cycle into a healthy state.



3. Choose a color palette out of the blue

If you want to further invest in your home design to optimize natural lighting, choosing the right color for your walls can make an enormous difference. Although white is the most reflective color, you can always go for a more colorful shade such as light-color pastels, which include lavender, pale yellow, powder blue and warm orange, for low-light rooms.



4. Lighting up!

If you live in an apartment with nearly any natural light coming in from the windows, investing in fixtures that project light upwards can give the illusion of a higher ceiling and widen the space. As the streams of light bounce off the ceiling, the room will look brighter and will require fewer artificial light bulbs to illuminate it.



5. Go window-shopping!

If you want a permanent solution for a room that barely gets any daylight (eg. bathroom), roof skylights would be the perfect alternative to having windows. They come in a variety of sizes and configurations and can work for almost anyone's budget. This alternative is also eco-friendly and energy-efficient!



In conclusion, minor and easy home changes can make an enormous difference in your everyday exposure to sunlight in order to prevent the winter blues during the colder months. This will lead to an enhanced mood, more energy, higher productivity, healthier sleep pattern and overall optimized quality of life³. In combination to that, making a habit to spend that afternoon coffee break on a short walk outside will be a



great investment of your time to ensure the full benefits of sunlight. In fact, your body really only needs 15 to 20 minutes of direct sunlight, and the best time of day to soak yourself in the sun is between 10 am to 3 pm. You are now better prepared to fight off the winter blues this season, good luck!

¹ https://cmha.ca/blogs/winter-blues-101#_ftnref1

² <https://www.rush.edu/news/more-just-winter-blues>

³ <https://www.rtor.org/2018/07/26/how-light-improves-mental-health/>