

Let's Get

PHYSICAL

Don't let the winter blues get you down. The short days and cold weather can make you want to hibernate until spring, but being a couch potato won't help your mood. Exercise helps you adjust to emotional and physical changes, such as the stress of being far from friends and family, and the physical differences of your environment, such as the reduced daylight hours and cooler temperatures. Physical exercise promotes longer, deeper sleep so that you feel rested and helps your brain release endorphins that stabilize your mood. Exercise can also help keep off the extra pounds from holiday festivities.

Escaping the Winter Blues

If you normally run, bicycle or play sports outside, you may need to move it indoors for the winter. Your installation's fitness center has a variety of cardio equipment, weights for strength training and classes to help stay active. Personal training is also available for a fee.

Group classes can be challenging, fun and provide the opportunity to meet new people. Available classes may include Zumba, yoga, body sculpting, spinning and step aerobics. Zumba is popular for its Latin-inspired dance moves that turned fitness into a party. Spinning is a high-intensity, cycling boot

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camp sure to leave you drenched in sweat. Classes are free or have small fees and are offered on a variety of days and times. Some facilities even provide childcare.

Winter Sports

Europe is home to many top destinations for winter sports. There's no time like the present to embrace the winter cold, gaze at breathtaking scenery and try a new sport

or get back into a seemingly long-forgotten passion. The good news is that ski and snowboarding schools in English are available at most European skiing destinations, whether you need beginner lessons or a refresher. There are also programs for children if you'll be bringing along little ones. If you don't have your own equipment, you can rent or buy everything you need at Outdoor Recreation or your skiing destination.

If you are a confident skier stateside, keep in mind that trails in Europe are often longer, narrower and may be more challenging than what you are used to. You also need to be aware of the potential perils; more trails are left ungroomed, the weather changes quickly from the base to mountaintop, and some resorts provide little in the way of peak condition warnings. A few years ago, I was caught in terrible whiteout conditions on a peak with no prior warnings and beautiful weather on the lift ride up. With no lodge or warming hut, the only way down was on my skis, a nightmare for a beginner like me. Since then, I've had great skiing experiences in Europe as a novice, so don't be afraid to try something new.

If you are not ready to book your own vacation or prefer to ski with a group, check out trips through Outdoor Recreation or MWR. Additionally, ski clubs that plan trips can be found in many military communities, combining the sport with social activities.

There are also other winter sports that will help you burn calories and work muscles. Try kite skiing, an increasingly popular sport that allows you to play with gravity as you ski downhill with a mini paragliding parachute. Sledding is also fun – downhill is a free ride, but hiking back up while dragging a sled will make you break a sweat. And if barreling down a mountain headfirst is not your idea of a good time, try snowshoeing, cross-country skiing or ice skating.

Whatever you choose, you're bound to increase your heart rate, use muscles you didn't know existed and end up in a snowball fight. The Europeans know how to end a day in the mountains – in the sauna or hot tub, followed by après-ski. One glass of wine won't hurt your waistline, and you've earned it! ■

