

Photo: Anthony Maw on Unsplash

WINTER 2026/27 · VANCOUVER

Your Winter Playbook

BC's first winter without turning the clocks back. Six research-backed moves to keep your sleep, energy and focus steady.

Pick one. Try it for three days.

THE CONDITIONS

What’s different this winter

Your body clock sets itself mainly by morning light. This winter, that light arrives an hour later on the clock, and Vancouver’s cloud cuts it further.



SUNRISE, DECEMBER 21

9:05 AM

Last winter it was 8:05 AM. For most people, the workday now starts in the dark.



DAYLIGHT, DECEMBER 21

8 hrs 11 min

The same amount as before. An hour of it moved from your morning to your evening.



OVER A LIFETIME, IN CANADA

About 15%

report milder seasonal symptoms, and 2 to 3% experience seasonal depression.

A winter dip is common and predictable, which means you can plan for it.

Sources: Government of British Columbia; timeanddate.com; Canadian Psychological Association. Times approximate.

WHERE TO START

Which one sounds like you lately?

Pick the one that fits, then turn to the move with the same number.

PATIENCE
Small delays get a bigger reaction than they deserve. 01

SLEEP
The alarm goes off three times before the day starts. 02

FOCUS
After one email, it takes a while to find your place again. 03

ENERGY
The after-work workout keeps turning into the couch. 04

MOTIVATION
A project you enjoy has sat untouched for weeks. 05

CONNECTION
Plans with friends keep moving to next week. 06

This is a self-check, not a screening test. You can start with any move.

One finding, one thing to try

01

PATIENCE

Protect your patience

A review of 154 experiments found that sleep loss reduced positive emotions and increased anxiety. A short fuse can be a sleep problem, not a people problem.

> TRY THIS
> When your patience slips, check whether you're tired, tense, hungry or overloaded. Deal with that first.

Palmer et al., Psychological Bulletin, 2024

02

SLEEP

Give mornings a clear start

Light is your body clock's main signal that the day has begun. Indoor light is far dimmer than daylight, but even a cloudy sky is brighter than a typical office.

> TRY THIS
> Wake at the same time for three days. Turn on bright lights as soon as you're up, and get outside in daylight when you can.

CDC/NIOSH; National Institute of Mental Health

03

FOCUS

Stay on one task longer

When you switch tasks, part of your attention stays on the last one. Researchers call this attention residue. A quick note on where to resume reduces it.

> TRY THIS
> Before you leave a task, write one line: where you stopped and what comes next.

Leroy & Glomb, Organization Science, 2018

04

ENERGY

Keep something in the tank

In over 190,000 adults, about half the recommended weekly activity was linked to an 18% lower risk of depression. The biggest difference came from going from nothing to something. It's an association, not proof of cause.

> **TRY THIS**
> Ten minutes of movement a day: the stairs, a walk at lunch, a lap of the block.

Pearce et al., JAMA Psychiatry, 2022

05

MOTIVATION

Start before you feel like it

Starting usually creates the motivation, not the other way around. Behavioural activation, a structured depression treatment built on this idea, was non-inferior to CBT at 12 months in a 440-person trial.

> **TRY THIS**
> Give five minutes to something you've been putting off. Then decide whether to keep going.

Richards et al., The Lancet, 2016

06

CONNECTION

Reach out to someone

Across 13 experiments, people underestimated how much others appreciated hearing from them, especially when the message was unexpected.

> **TRY THIS**
> Send one message this week. Suggest a call, a coffee or a walk.

Liu et al., Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 2023

AT HOME

Your first ten minutes at home

What you do when you walk in often sets the whole evening. A tired night on the couch is fine. But if an hour on your phone means the walk or the call you planned doesn’t happen, most nights, you lose what keeps your energy and mood up.

FOR THREE EVENINGS

- ● **Notice** what you do in the first ten minutes.
- ● **Check** whether it helps you recover.
- ○ **Adjust** one thing if it doesn’t.

POSSIBLE ADJUSTMENTS

- Eat something before making evening plans.
- Take a short walk before settling in.
- Spend ten minutes talking with someone at home.

The point is to notice what your routine leads to, not to turn every evening into another productivity exercise.

Your three-day plan

Plans tied to a specific moment get done more often than general intentions. Pick one move and decide exactly when you'll do it.

FOR EXAMPLE

"When my last meeting ends, I'll walk for ten minutes before heading home."

WHEN _____

I WILL _____

☐ Day 1 ☐ Day 2 ☐ Day 3

AFTER THREE DAYS

Did you follow through? What helped or got in the way? Keep it, adjust it or try another move. Some benefits take longer to show.

Sheeran, Listrom & Gollwitzer, European Review of Social Psychology, 2024

When to get more support

These moves support everyday wellbeing. They aren't a treatment for depression or seasonal affective disorder. Talk to your doctor or a counsellor if a low stretch:

- lasts two weeks or more,
- gets in the way of work, sleep or relationships, or
- comes back around the same time every year.

Both conditions have established treatments, including psychotherapy, medication and, when appropriate, light therapy.

9-8-8 If you're thinking about suicide, call or text 9-8-8, any time. In immediate danger, call 9-1-1.



Want to talk something through?

Iroko Health Counselling offers a free 20-minute virtual intro call. Book at irokohealth.com

References. Government of British Columbia (2026), Permanent daylight saving time. timeanddate.com, Vancouver sunrise and sunset, December 2025 and 2026. Canadian Psychological Association, seasonal affective disorder fact sheet. CDC/NIOSH, Using light to promote a better sleep/wake cycle. National Institute of Mental Health, Seasonal affective disorder. Palmer et al. (2024), Psychological Bulletin. Leroy & Glomb (2018), Organization Science. Pearce et al. (2022), JAMA Psychiatry. Richards et al. (2016), The Lancet. Liu et al. (2023), Journal of Personality and Social Psychology. Sheeran, Listrom & Gollwitzer (2024), European Review of Social Psychology.

Written by Isi Oboh, Registered Clinical Counsellor (BCACC), Iroko Health, Vancouver. Last reviewed November 2026. Educational information, not a diagnosis.