



It's hitting and it's hitting hard. You know what I'm talking about... the glorious season called winter and all the lovely things that come along with it. The hot chocolate and warm fireplaces are great during the holidays but when the festivities are over, now what?

For people who live in colder climates, winter can bring about a slew of health conditions. Our physical, mental & emotional health can be affected.

What is SAD?

Seasonal Affective Disorder or (SAD) is a temporary depression that occurs during the late fall and winter months. A more common term for this condition might be known as the "Winter Blues."

Symptoms of SAD

Symptoms vary in degree and range from:

- Feeling depressed for most of the day
- Tired or low energy
- Problems with sleep (oversleeping or inability to sleep)
- Changes in appetite especially a craving for foods high in carbohydrates or "comfort foods"
- Weight gain
- Feeling sluggish
- Difficulty concentrating
- Irritability, agitation or anxiety

Between 4% and 6% of people in the United States suffer from SAD. Another 10% to 20% may experience a mild form of winter-onset SAD.

Technically, in order to be clinically diagnosed with SAD you must have experienced the above symptoms for at least two years in a row around the same time of year. However, in my personal experience, when reaching for a handful of cookies while crying at a Pampers commercial, one season of SAD is enough for a self diagnosis!

Importance of Sunlight

This lack of sunlight impacts our bodies significantly! When we are exposed to sunlight our bodies produce Serotonin and synthesize vitamin D, which help improve our sleep and boost our mood.

Some experts believe that a lack of sunlight increases the body's production of a body chemical called melatonin. Melatonin is a chemical that aids sleep, but in excess can cause symptoms of depression.

What you can do?

You don't have to suffer from these symptoms. There are many things you can do to avoid and prevent the onset of SAD.



Diet

It is important to maintain a healthy diet with complex carbohydrates, fresh fruits, vegetables and lean proteins to combat SAD. Some foods you can incorporate into your diet include:



- Swiss Chard
- Blue Potatoes
- Grass Fed Lamb
- Dark Chocolate
- Asparagus
- Honey
- Eggs

Numerous studies have shown that the brain produces feelings of happiness when you consume high-calorie, high-fat foods. Opt for healthier choices!

Supplements

Vitamin D

As mentioned, we synthesize vitamin D from the sun, and since there is less exposure to the sun during the winter months, it is important to make sure we are maintain healthy levels of Vitamin D with supplementation.

Omeegas

Our bodies cannot make these essential omega-3 fatty acids on their own, so we've got to eat them!

- Oily, fatty fish (mackerel, herring, salmon, sardines, anchovies) are the best sources of omega-3s because they contain the "more potent" forms of omega-3s.

- Other sources rich in alpha-linolenic acid (ALA) include: oils of flaxseed, hemp, canola and walnuts.

5-HTP

Also known as 5-Hydroxytryptophan, 5-HTP increases the synthesis of serotonin. Natural forms of 5 HTP can be produced from the seeds of an African plant (*Griffonia simplicifolia*)

Essential Oils

Interesting fact:

The ancient Egyptians used many essential oils as medicine and their recipes are recorded in the hieroglyphics.

Essential Oils can be ingested, placed on the skin or inhaled.

- Lemon & grapefruit (mild depression, water retention)
- Rosemary, basil (fatigue, mental confusion, respiratory concerns)
- Pettigrain & bergamot (balancing, uplifting)
- Lavender (insomnia, tension headaches)
- Clary sage (mild depression, aggression, PMS)

Exercise

Movement is an integral part of our lives. Exercise has been proven to improve mood, relieve stress and increases energy. Oxygenating our brains and bodies has a variety of health benefits which will help you out of the “winter blues.”

Heat loss tends to come from the hands, feet and head, so wear gloves, warm socks and a hat and you'll tend to find it easier to regulate temperature if you opt to exercise outside.

Acupuncture

Acupuncture helps treat the root of the problem as well as the symptoms. It can help move and redirect stagnant energy or qi (“chee”) to reestablish a balance in the body. A state of relaxation is achieved during a treatment which carries on into your daily life. Acupuncture releases endorphins to boost mood and helps to reduce stress. Acupuncture also helps quell those comfort food cravings.

Whether it is “winter blues,” clinically or self diagnosed Seasonal Affective Disorder, you don't have to find yourself grabbing for junk food crying at diaper commercials! Take control of your life and your health with these effective ways to prevent and treat Seasonal Affective Disorder.