

Banishing the Winter Blahs

Gray, gloomy skies coupled with cold weather often dominate winter. Then add in months of Covid-19 stress along with the holidays, and you could have an overwhelming, wintery season. It's been a difficult, demanding year, but let's try to understand more about the "winter blahs" so we can avoid them!

A lack of proper sunshine lessens our Vitamin D levels which not only affects our mood, but also our energy level, concentration, and overall health (heart, bones, brain, teeth, muscles, immune system, and more). Experts agree that sunshine is our best source of Vitamin D because our bodies naturally make Vitamin D in our skin when our skin is exposed to sunlight. Certain foods and vitamin supplements can definitely help, but sunlight is the best way to create the amount of Vitamin D we need. Some individuals suffer from a more severe form of the winter blahs called, Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD).

Symptoms of Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD):

- Feeling sad and depressed most of the time
- Not appreciating activities that once brought joy
- Having difficulty focusing on tasks
- Not sleeping well
- Feeling tired and hopeless
- Having no energy or extremely low levels of energy
- Experiencing changes in weight and/or appetite
- Feeling hopeless or suicidal

What can I do to avoid the winter blahs?

- Bundle up, go outside and soak up a little sunshine; if this isn't possible, talk to a health expert about light therapy (a way to treat SAD with artificial light)
- Get some exercise; take a little time each day for a break and exercise that is appropriate for you
- Be social; yes, being social during a pandemic is challenging, but it is important to call loved ones and/or video-chat with friends
- Get plenty of sleep and follow proper sleep habits such as limiting caffeine in the evenings and turning off electronic devices
- Ensure you are practicing nutritious and well-balanced eating habits; create colorful plates full of fruits and vegetables
- Play your "happy" jam playlist to lift your mood and dance around your living room if you want
- Be more mindful of each moment; stop being the multi-tasking whiz and work on increasing your focus with each task
- Do something kind for someone else; shifting your attention and well-being efforts to others will lift your mood
- Start a new project, learn a fresh skill, or challenge yourself with a reachable goal

“The sun, -- the bright sun, that brings back, not light alone, but new life, and hope, and freshness to man – burst upon the crowded city in clear and radiant glory.” Charles Dickens

If you are struggling with the winter blahs and need someone to talk to please reach out to a PAS Counselor. Your EAP is a free, confidential service provided to you by your employer. It is important to take care of yourself, especially during stressful times. You can reach PAS by calling 800-356-0845 or going to www.paseap.com to chat live with a counselor.

In addition to counseling, PAS also offers an array of services that offer guidance and support for weight management and nutrition, health and wellbeing, fitness, parenting, goal achievement, tobacco cessation, legal and financial questions, elder and childcare, and much more.

Sources researched: <https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/seasonal-affective-disorder/symptoms-causes/syc-20364651>, <https://www.verywellmind.com/how-to-beat-the-winter-blues-5087998>, <https://www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/318060#vitamin-D>