

The Winter Blues Can Be a SAD Story

American Osteopathic Association

With the winter months quickly approaching, the days appear to be much shorter. Even though you may not know it, the decrease in light during this time of the year can affect your mood and well-being.

Known as seasonal affective disorder (SAD), 4 to 6 percent of the general population experience SAD. The Cleveland Clinic Health Information Center indicates that women are four times more likely to suffer from SAD than men. Also, people between 20 to 50 years of age are at a higher risk of being affected. Further research indicates that geographic location plays a role as well, meaning that people living in areas where there is still an abundant amount of sunlight during winter, like Arizona, are less likely to be affected by this disorder.

“Seasonal affective disorder begins to affect people as early as September through the first part of April,” explains Craig M. Wax, D.O., an osteopathic Family Physician from Mullica Hill, NJ.

Symptoms of SAD can be similar to symptoms of typical depression, they may include:

- Extreme fatigue, difficulty getting up in the morning, or sleeping much more than usual
- Loss of energy or interest in usual activities
- Increased appetite, weight gain, or craving carbohydrates
- Inability to concentrate
- Decreased sex drive
- Suicidal thoughts or feelings

“Due to the similarities between SAD and depression and anxiety, this is not a condition that should be self-diagnosed or self-treated,” Dr. Wax stresses. “If you notice these symptoms interfering with your daily activities, consult your physician.”

Researchers at the National Institute of Mental Health have concluded that SAD is primarily due to sunlight deprivation. Evidence suggests that the disorder arises from abnormalities in how the body manages its internal biological rhythms in

response to the shortened or minor daylight in winter.

As a result of this finding, one option of treatment includes daily light therapy called phototherapy. The treatment is typically administered using the light from fluorescent bulbs or tubes. Light bulbs are generally encased in small, portable cubicle devices covered with a plastic screen that helps block out potentially harmful ultraviolet (UV) rays that can cause cataracts and skin problems.

Patients sit in front of the light box allowing the light from the box to indirectly enter their eyes; as skin exposure isn't effective. Patients are warned to avoid looking directly at the light box because the light can damage eyes.

“The cornerstones of treatment for SAD are exercise, stress management and full-range light therapy. Also, it may include medications like antidepressants and cognitive behavioral therapy,” explains Dr. Wax.

If you're feeling blue again this winter, you may be experiencing seasonal affective disorder. The important thing to remember is to seek an evaluation from your physician, he explains.

Get More Vegetables in Your Day

Tracy Olgeaty Gensler, R.D.

Frozen vegetables are the best kept secret around. They are nutritious (most are frozen within hours of being picked) and if properly handled by the grocer, they maintain their nutritional value in your freezer for up to six months. Once you have a freezer full of vegetables, it's not much work to heat them up and enjoy for them for nearly any meal or snack. Who wants to stand around and chop onions when you can purchase frozen chopped onions? You don't have to worry about that fresh onion going moldy in your vegetable drawer, and preparation is so quick with the frozen variety you won't believe how much more time you have to enjoy with your family.

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Aim for having two servings per person twice a day. So make some room in the freezer and choose the most decadent, appealing frozen vegetables in your store!

Tips on Choosing and Preparing Frozen Vegetables

- Look for brightly colored vegetables. They will provide the most nutrition.
- Grade A or “fancy” frozen vegetables are carefully selected vegetables that are free from blemishes and have superior color and tenderness. They are the most tender, succulent, and flavorful vegetables produced. Avoid cheaper varieties of vegetables that contain mostly broccoli stalk or mushy, faded carrots. Spend the extra money for the beautiful florets of broccoli and the appealing crinkle cut carrots.
- Don’t purchase varieties of vegetables that are frozen into one solid lump in the bag or have thick frost on the outside of the package. These bags may have been improperly stored (melted and refrozen!) and they may taste like freezer burn. Yuck!
- Combine vegetables such as sweet green soybeans (edamame beans), sliced red, orange and yellow peppers, broccoli florets and stir fry with a teaspoon of olive oil and a teaspoon of pine nuts per person and watch everyone ask for more.
- When stir frying, experiment with different oils and a variety of nuts and seeds to pack some flavor into your dishes. Purchase the tiniest bottles of oils (after all, we’re not using a lot at one time) and keep all of your seeds and nuts labeled and dated in the freezer to keep them fresh longer. Try cooking with some new flair, for Asian try sesame oil and sesame seeds, for Cajun try canola oil and cayenne pepper, black pepper and lemon pepper and for Indian try canola oil with tumeric or cumin.

- If you don’t have time to stir fry, experiment with cooking them in your microwave. Just throw them in a microwave-safe dish, skip the oil and add some nuts (again, about 1 teaspoon per person is ideal) and heat them up.

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Get Up And Get Moving

Craig M. Wax, D.O.

Winter is here and it is cold. Now is a great time to get into or keep up your exercise regimen. No one likes unwanted holiday pounds. That is why we all make new year’s resolutions to change. Exercise is a dynamite way to get to your ideal weight and keep warm.

Cardiovascular exercise is important to your health. Getting your body and heart moving is the way to go. You can walk fast, run, bike, swim, dance, jump rope or any other activity that you can dream up.

All you have to do is get your heart up to your target zone for 20 to 30 minutes every other day to see results. The target heart rate is 70% to 80 % of the difference of 220 minus your age. Easier still is Dr. Wax’s good sweat rule. Get moving with exercise and get up a good sweat. You should be sweating and active, but still be able to maintain a conversation without getting winded.

Get up and get to it every day for the best results. Enjoy your vitality through exercise.

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