

Ways to Combat the Winter Blues seasonal affective disorder (SAD)

It's wintertime! (As if you hadn't noticed, right?) Well, every winter I experience some major SAD or "Seasonal Affective Disorder." Melissa let me write this article in an attempt to help me work through it! Will you join me on the journey?



Let's start with defining "seasonal affective disorder." Simply put, SAD is "seasonal depression," or what I call "the winter blues," others call it winter depression. It basically occurs when those of us with relatively *normal* mental health throughout most of the year experience depressive symptoms in the winter (or even summer) months.

4 Common Causes of SAD:

1. Decreased sunlight / shorter days

Sunlight stimulates the production of that "feel good" neurotransmitter called serotonin. Less sunlight = less opportunity to stimulate this chemical.

Possible solution

If you can, spend at least 15 minutes outside each day to make sure you're stimulating this valuable

(natural) anti-depressant. You can also buy natural light lamps, which simulate natural light. Something like this might be handy to place next to your favorite book-reading chair, or your computer desk!

2. It's in the air

Studies are beginning to reveal a link between air quality and mental health. Toxins, molds, pollens, and chemicals in our everyday home and office environments can create depressed emotional states.

Possible solution

Set up an air purifier in the place you spend the bulk of your day... um, breathing. FYI: You're bound to spend nearly 1/3 of your life sleeping, so setting a small unit up in your bedroom would be a good place to start.

3. Being too sedentary

I don't know about you, but I'd rather spend my long winter evenings curled up with my Kindle app, watching a movie, or sitting at the computer designing something. Of course, what this means is that I tend to slack off on exercising. Exercise has been clinically shown to have a positive mitigating effect on winter depression.

Possible solution

Even a few minutes of walking, is better than doing nothing at all. Or hit the gym if you fancy that kind of thing! I don't care for going to a gym to workout myself, so I (when motivated) will generally pop in an exercise DVD. *Hopefully writing this article will motivate me!!*

4. Decreased Vitamin D

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Decreased levels of vitamin D can also be linked to SAD. Lack of sunlight in the winter months tends to make getting enough Vitamin D naturally close to impossible.

Possible solution

Over-the-counter vitamin D supplements can be purchased at any health store, even most grocery stores carry it now. Talk with your doctor or pharmacist about what dose might be best for you.

Foods that fight depression:

Did you know there were foods that help fight depression? Here are a few I found while researching:

Salmon

This super-food is high in omega-3s, a vitamin that works hard on your behalf to reduce feelings of depression. It also contains vitamin B12 (*low levels of B12 lessen the production of serotonin*) and other key regulators in mood stability.

I have a great recipe for salmon that I'm going to share with you now! My kids even LOVE it!

Asian Salmon

4 Salmon portions
½ C olive oil
¼ C Tamara (Soy) sauce
2 Tbs Dijon Mustard
1 clove garlic, minced

Whisk together oil, soy sauce, mustard, and garlic. Reserve approximately ¼ C of this mixture in a prep bowl. Marinate salmon portions in remaining liquid for at least 20 minutes. Grill

salmon 5-7 minutes on each side (or I suppose you could bake it at 375° for 20 minutes or so). Serve immediately with reserved liquid drizzled on top!

Chocolate

Before you get overly excited and run to your private stash of decadent chocolate delights... I should note that we are talking about dark chocolate here. Delicious in it's own right, but I do prefer the milky kind myself 😊 Oh, I should profess a disclaimer here: I am not responsible for anyone over-eating chocolates as a result of this article (milk or dark); nor is Melissa Chappell or any other member of her team! ...Remember, everything in moderation!

All kidding aside, dark chocolate stimulates the release of phenylalanine [fen-l-al-uh-need], which, consequently, increases the level of dopamine in the brain, a natural pain blocker. *note: The higher the cocoa percentage, the more effective the chocolate will be! PS If you aren't as keen on dark chocolate, you could always drink it with a glass of milk - which contains lots of vitamin D! hehehe 😊*

Super fruits

Bananas are a super source of energy! They also contain magnesium, which improves sleep quality and decreases levels of anxiety.

Oranges (and other fruits high in vitamin C) give you a decent boost of energy, too. They are also an excellent immunity-booster! Vitamin C has anti-anxiety benefits as well.

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Blueberries, strawberries, and raspberries all contribute to a healthy rationing release of cortisol, the hormone that helps to regulate stress and balances your emotions.

Nuts

Nuts are a good source of magnesium and omega-3s. [Walnuts are an especially excellent source of omega-3s.]

Processed /Refined Sugar

No, I'm not going to advocate an indulgence in foods high in sugar, I'm actually advising you to do the opposite and avoid them. Foods high in processed sugars tend to slow down brain function. While you may *temporarily* feel better after eating something like a candy bar, the low that follows the "sugar high" can put a real damper on your overall mood. Not to mention, such temporary fixes usually come at a high price in the long run, like carrying extra pounds, or risking the onset of diseases such as diabetes!

Some non-food-related-helps:

Talk about it

Open up (honestly) about your feelings to someone you trust, your spouse, a friend, a parent, etc. Wearing your heart on your sleeve leaves you vulnerable, but it can also prove to be a valuable therapeutic remedy. Even if you don't "know" what is causing your SADness, talking about your feelings can help.

If you're not sure about that, keep a journal. I like to write, a lot, when I'm feeling especially low. I journal in the form of letter writing to a trusted mentor. It lifts a weight off my shoulders to get things out in the open!

Essential oils

Aromatherapy is becoming more and more popular in our culture. I won't expound on this topic, as it could be an article all by itself, but I trust you could go into any good health-related store which stocks these oils and ask for a mood-elevating blend.

Conclusion:

There is no single solution to wiping away SAD, it's a complex problem and will generally involve a lot of effort on your part to fix it. Ideally, you could combine many of these ideas and make a lifestyle change to fight against it. In time, you could even *look forward* to winter! (Don't laugh!)

Seriously though, whatever you do, don't just ignore it. Talk to your doctor if your SAD becomes especially unbearable!

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