



February 2017

Winter Blues

Health Newsletter

The winter season begins with holiday cheer, but many people feel a little “off” as the cold weather drags on. Often it is just how our bodies are responding to the darker and colder days. The sun rises later in the morning and dark comes earlier in the evening, but our schedules require us to keep going as if nothing has changed. This shift, along with other factors, including genetic predisposition and body chemistry, may affect your mental health.



Exercising, eating nutritious foods, practicing mindfulness, and maintaining social support are core components of a healthy lifestyle.

Light

When your body is craving more daylight, sitting next to an artificial light for 30 minutes per day can be as effective as antidepressant medication. Opening blinds and curtains, trimming back tree branches, and sitting closer to windows can also help provide an extra dose of sunshine.

Food

Certain foods, like chocolate, can help to enhance your mood and relieve anxiety. Sweets like candy and carbohydrates like potato chips, cookies and soda provide temporary feelings of euphoria, but could ultimately increase feelings of anxiety and depression.



Exercise



Morning and day exercise might be beneficial especially if it includes aerobic activity under bright light. Exercise raises the levels of endorphins in the brain, therefore increasing pleasure and lifting the blues. However, exercising late at night can lead to a delay in the onset of melatonin release and prevent a good night's sleep.

Meditation

Meditation helps improve mood. Some scientists believe that meditation, as well as exercise, promote the release of endorphins, which are considered the body's natural painkillers. Our emotions and how we react to stress can have profound effects on our health. A stressful life can lead to digestive problems and depression. Meditation is not about attending expensive classes. It is about taking just a few minutes to clear your mind so you can see a way out of your problems more clearly. It takes 15 to 20 minutes a day to calm your mind and think positively.



Reading

Reading an interesting book can transform your mood. Reading novels in particular is good for building confidence in people who are depressed. By distracting yourself, you can escape from the worries, stress of the everyday routine, and explore the author's imagination.



The subject you read about can bring inner peace and tranquility. Reading spiritual texts can lower blood pressure and bring sense of calm.

Fun "Stuff"

Turn on your favorite music, which can cheer you up and bring pleasant memories.



Book a vacation if your time and budget allow it. Sometimes just planning a vacation causes a significant increase in overall happiness. Plan for the future if taking a vacation sooner would not work with your schedule.

Help Others

Volunteering your time can improve mental health. Working at local soup kitchen or animal shelter can bring life satisfaction. Gratitude for your work will make you healthier and boost your emotions. Making others happy will help you feel happy yourself. If you are crafty and have a good imagination, you can combine fabric, yarn and recyclables to bring much-needed fun into the lives of local shelter and rescue pets. Try braiding strips of fleece or tie a rope to create fun toys for cats and dogs.



Psychotherapy

In more severe cases of "winter blues", like SAD (Seasonal Affective Disorder), therapy can ease the sense of isolation or loneliness and help revise the negative thoughts and feelings associated with a depressed mood. It also can help people with SAD understand their condition and learn ways to prevent or minimize future bouts.

References:

Goodchild, S. (2009). Beat the winter blues...without pills. *Evening Standard*.