Winter Blues and You

During the cold winter months, it is not uncommon for some people to experience “winter blues.” This is especially true for many senior adults as they use caution and do not venture out on days with questionable weather. What many people don’t know is that the winter blues is actually a mild depression brought on by a decrease in exposure to sunlight as autumn deepens.

Winter Blues and Seasonal Affective Disorder

Many individuals who suffer from the winter blues fall into a depressed mood each year in the fall and continue to feel depressed throughout the winter and into the early spring, when these feelings disappear. The winter blues are primarily caused by unstable melatonin levels, a hormone produced during sleep, and serotonin, a neurotransmitter responsible for mood, hunger, and sleep. As the days become shorter and the hours of sunlight decrease, sufferers of the winter blues experience changes in their mood, energy level, and ability to concentrate.

The winter blues has a more severe counterpart, Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD). SAD is another type of depression that, like winter blues, is related to an access problem between the brain’s pituitary and hypothalamus glands caused by lack of sunlight. Individuals suffering from SAD should seek medical advice. About 6 percent of Americans have SAD, and another 14 percent have the winter blues.

Do You Have Winter Blues?

Although the winter blues are not as severe as long-term depression, they can change the way a person thinks, reacts, and deals with everyday challenges.

If you experience two or more of these symptoms each year in the fall and into the spring you may suffer from the winter blues:
- Increased feelings of lethargy
- Difficulty waking up in the mornings as the days get shorter
- Difficulty concentrating and thinking creatively in comparison to the summer months
- Incorrectly blaming oneself for things that go wrong
- Difficulty performing tasks that normally seem to be easy/enjoyable
- Increased craving for carbohydrate-rich food like chocolate and sodas

Treatment

There is no known way to prevent the development of winter blues, however, there are steps you can take to manage symptoms and keep them from getting worse over time.

Light Boxes - Multiple studies found that the majority of those suffering from the winter blues experienced relief solely from the regular use of "light boxes."

Light boxes emit high intensities of light and produce similar effects to the sun’s natural rays. The high intensities of light improve the mood of those suffering from the winter blues because they restrict the secretion of melatonin in the brain. These boxes are best used daily and in the

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Garlicky Mashed Sweet Potatoes

1 large head garlic
1 Tbsp. finely chopped fresh rosemary
1 Tbsp. olive oil
8 cups large sweet potatoes, peeled & diced
2 cups apples, peeled and diced
2 tsp. salt
1 tsp. balsamic vinegar

Preheat oven to 375°F. Cut top off garlic head, exposing cloves. Place on piece of foil, and top with chopped rosemary. Drizzle with olive oil. Wrap loosely with foil, and bake 50 to 60 minutes, or until soft and golden.

Place sweet potatoes and apples in pot with enough water to cover. Add salt, cover pot, and bring to a boil. Reduce heat to medium, and simmer 10 minutes, or until sweet potatoes are soft. Drain, and reserve 1 cup cooking water. Transfer to serving bowl.

Squeeze roasted garlic cloves into sweet potatoes and apples. Add balsamic vinegar, and mash, adding cooking water as necessary to adjust texture for creaminess. Season with pepper, and serve hot. Serves 8.

Nutritional Information: Calories: 158, Protein: 2g, Total fat: 2g, Saturated fat: 0.5g, Carbs: 34g, Cholesterol: mg, Sodium: 220mg, Fiber: 5g, Sugars: 10g

Source: http://www.vegetariantimes.com/recipes/10726

SWEET POTATOES: Found in your local markets year-round, sweet potatoes are an excellent source of vitamin A (in the form of beta-carotene). Also, a very good source of vitamin C, sweet potatoes have healing properties as an antioxidant food. Both beta-carotene and vitamin C are very powerful antioxidants that work in the body to eliminate free radicals. (Free radicals are chemicals that damage cells and cell membranes and are associated with the development of conditions like atherosclerosis, diabetoc heart disease, and colon cancer.) This may explain why beta-carotene and vitamin C have both been shown to be helpful for preventing these conditions.

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GARLIC: The same compounds that are responsible for garlic’s characteristically pungent odor, are also the source of many of its health-promoting effects. In addition, garlic is an excellent source of manganese, a very good source of vitamin B6 and vitamin C and a good source of selenium. Numerous studies have demonstrated potential benefits of regular garlic consumption on blood pressure, platelet aggregation, serum triglyceride level, and cholesterol levels. As a result, garlic may help prevent atherosclerosis and diabetic heart disease, as well as reduce the risk of heart attack or stroke.

January is National Radon Action Month

Radon is a naturally occurring gas that can enter the house from rocks, soil or water beneath the house. You cannot, see, smell, or taste radon, but it can be harmful to your health. Radon is estimated to cause many thousands of deaths each year because breathing air-containing radon can cause lung cancer. In fact, the Surgeon General has warned that radon is the second leading cause of lung cancer in the United States today. Only smoking causes more lung cancer deaths. Radon levels can be tested in your home, and if they are dangerously high, ventilation methods can reduce the levels. The Swain County Cooperative Extension is offering a:

Radon Information Session
and giving away free radon detection kits

January 19, 2010
6:00 p.m.

Call 488-3848 for more details and to register.

Cook Smart Eat Smart
back by popular demand

Cook Smart Eat Smart was designed to bring North Carolinians back to the kitchen with simple, nutritious recipes and cooking methods such as roasting, stir frying or using a crock pot. It also provides information on practicing home food safety, buying and using basic pots and knives, and getting more for your money at the grocery story. Course enrollment is limited, so please register early by calling 488-3848.

4-week program
February 2
February 9
February 16
February 23

10:00 a.m. - 2:00 p.m.
Cost: $35 for all 4 classes
(includes foods that participants will prepare and eat for lunch and a Cook Smart, Eat Smart recipe book)
The Chore Chart

Does it seem easier do it yourself than hover over a child to complete a household chore? Whether it is taking out the trash, feeding the dog, watering the plants, or even making a bed, learning to do chores correctly seems painful. But it doesn't have to be. When children are old enough to walk, they are old enough to start taking responsibility. Assigning age-appropriate chores while making them fun is key. Here is a sample list of what chores children are capable of doing by age:

- **2-3 year olds** - pick-up toys and put on shelf or in toy box, dump small trash can contents into larger trash can
- **4-6 year olds** - All above plus make bed, wipe up spills, feed pets, water low level plants, weed garden
- **7-10 year olds** - all above plus put dishes in dishwasher, unload (most of) the dishwasher, fold clothes, take trash to the curb, help wash the car

Now the question is how to get children to actually do these chores to be helpful at home. One thing to remember with young children is that they want to help. Young children (2-5) are interested in doing "big people" activities. Allowing them to do some chores is special to them. Also, developmentally, they are concrete thinkers. This means they can't retain a list of "to do's" in their head, but making them a chore chart makes it fun. Cut out magazine or catalog images related to the chore. Write the word on the chart beside the picture. List the days of the week across the top and the 2-3 chores down the side. Hang a pencil with the chart on their bedroom door and before you know it, they are picking up toys, brushing their teeth, and putting their toys on the shelf, then using the pencil to add a check mark to the chart. Your positive praise helps them do it again and again. You working with them, singing, playing a children's musical CD, and modeling good household chore completion reinforces the task and makes it fun for the child.

Karen DeBord, Family Life Specialist, NC State University

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Winter Blues and You

early morning for periods of 30 minutes to two hours.

**Exercise** - Many studies show that aerobic exercise decreases feelings of depression in all age groups. Not only does aerobic exercise improve mood, but it has also been shown to reduce stress, which often exacerbates feelings of depression brought on by the winter blues. Exercising outside is beneficial, even on days with cloudy skies. Aerobic exercise rids winter blues sufferers from feelings of depression because it increases serotonin levels.

**Food and Nutrition** - Many people who suffer from the winter blues crave junk food and soft drinks as the days get shorter. High-sugar foods and carbohydrates are often effective in increasing serotonin levels in the brain, which decreases feelings of winter blues. A better strategy for anyone with the winter blues would be to eat larger portions of complex carbohydrates, like pasta and rice, and healthy simple carbohydrates like fruits and fruit juices. Try to resist the unhealthy snacks as, although they will cause momentary relief, they ultimately decrease energy.

**Sleep Strategies** - As one of the symptoms of winter blues is difficulty getting up in the morning, those suffering from the winter blues are often asleep when the morning sun is up and shining. This limits the number of hours that those with the winter blues are exposed to sunlight. Winter blues sufferers should make an effort to expose themselves to sunlight in the early morning, for example, take an early morning walk outside or open the curtains in your home as soon as you rise. Try to limit oversleeping and fluctuations in sleep-wake schedules as the increased levels of melatonin during sleep can contribute to feelings of depression. It is helpful to set a regular bedtime and wake up at the same time each day. In general, adults need eight hours of sleep a night. A good night’s sleep will give you more energy during the day and reduce feelings of depression.

**Medication** - Some individuals who suffer from more severe cases of the winter blues might find that anti-depressant medicine, in conjunction with other forms of therapy, assist mood. Drugs which increase levels of serotonin by blocking re-uptake sites in the brain have proven effective with some patients. Before taking any medications, first speak to your physician.

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Winter 2010
What's Happening?

Call Swain County Cooperative Extension at 488-3848 for more information.

**COMING SOON in 2010!**

**Back to Basics** - features a series of multi-faceted educational seminars that deal with building a sustainable, self-reliant thriving home as well as specific ways to extend financial resources, such as green cleaning, cooking, home gardening and food preservation. More information to come next month!

**Cook Smart Eat Smart** - (February 2, 9, 16, and 23) from 10 a.m. - 2 p.m. Cost is $35.00. More information on page 3.

**Community Garden** - There are a limited number of community garden plots available for 2010 on a first come first serve basis. Call 488-3848 or stop by for additional information and to fill out an application. Cost per plot is $25.

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**ON-GOING PROGRAMS**

**SHIIP Senior Health Insurance Information Program** is a consumer information division of the NC Department of Insurance that assists people with choosing a Medicare Part D prescription drug plan. Call 488-3848 for an appointment.

**Eat Smart Move More Weigh Less** is a program that will explore behaviors that help you achieve and maintain a healthy weight by living mindfully and creating new, lifelong habits. Weekly 90-minute meetings include weigh-ins, goal setting, nutrition education, counseling and support, information, recipes and cooking demonstrations.

**Pressure Canner Testing**: Did you know that if you have a pressure canner with a dial gauge, you should have it tested every year. Please call us if you need to have your gauge tested.