

Don't Be Sad: 3 Ways to Beat the Winter Blues, Naturally

NEWTON, N.J. – Jan. 3 (SEND2PRESS NEWSWIRE) – According to William Seifried, MA, LPC, we are all liable to get a case of the blahs during these gloomy winter days, but some people suffer a persistent wintertime depression called Seasonal Affective Disorder, SAD. SAD is related to and most likely caused by the relative scarcity of light in winter. 1.7% of the population experiences SAD in Florida, 9.7% in Maine, and 20% in Sweden. Fortunately, Seifried, a Licensed Professional Counselor with a holistic counseling practice in Newton, New Jersey (MyHolisticMind.com), suggests some natural preventatives you and your family can incorporate to stay well this winter.



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SAD symptoms are much like those of other forms of depression. You may feel lackluster, not taking pleasure from normally enjoyable activities, and simply not your normal self. SAD is not to be confused with feeling blah for a day or two, nor with other types of depression. It descends for weeks if not months at a time during the darker periods of the year, and then lifts with the return of increased sunlight.

(Photo Caption: William Seifried MA LPC.)

The depression resulting from SAD varies in severity and can reach a point where some patients must be hospitalized. Therefore, the wisest line of defense against the condition involves early intervention and preventative measures. Determining with certainty that a person has Seasonal Affective Disorder rather than another sort of depression might take several years. If, for example, you suffer darker season depression for three years in a row and feel well during the spring and summer, then quite likely the problem is SAD. However, none of the standard measures taken against SAD harm a person suffering another sort of depression and in fact can do them a great deal of good according to the NJ counselor.

Seifried believes in three main preventive lines of defense against SAD: exercise, a balanced diet, and light therapy. Many people reduce the amount of exercise they get in winter which alone makes them more vulnerable to seasonal depression. Seifried explains, "What's most indicated is outdoor exercise on nice days. The increased exposure to sunlight can reduce or even eliminate the problem."

He continues, "There can be no exaggerating the role a balanced diet plays in keeping you and your family in a consistent state of health. Some people assuage their winter blues with comfort foods full of sugars and starches that give them a quick high followed by a nasty crash, leaving them more vulnerable to depression than before."

For patients who are indeed already experiencing SAD, Omega-3 fatty acids, vitamin B complexes and minerals do much to alleviate symptoms. Along with striving to get those nutrients from wholesome food sources, taking supplements helps insure a steady supply of them to the body. Micro-filtered fish oil capsules are an excellent, mercury-free source of Omega-3. Vitamin B complexes as well as mineral drops are readily obtainable in vitamin stores.

The most effective actual treatment for SAD is light therapy. Bright light boxes designed for this purpose are available and have a success rate of about 85%. You must remain near the bright light box for around one hour per day but do not have to stare at it slavishly. You can read or do other activities while experiencing the therapeutic exposure to bright light.

Exercise, a balanced diet, and light therapy are certainly suggested for overall health and brain function but may not alone "cure" all cases of SAD, Seifried warns.

Some individuals have also found Melatonin helpful in treating SAD. People with seasonal affective disorder experience a shift in their melatonin levels as the seasons change, not unlike the hibernation cycles of mammals. Melatonin is a hormone produced by the pineal gland and may help readjust this biological clock. However, Seifried strongly suggests seeking professional counsel prior to taking Melatonin.

"I do not recommend knee-jerk prescriptions of psychopharmaceuticals for Seasonal Affective Disorder. Prevention and proper attention will in most cases provide adequate relief without having to run the risk of medication side effects," he explains. Whether you or a family member suffer from SAD, you should know that a combination of exercise, dietary balance and light therapy could well leave you H-A-P-P-Y this winter.

William Seifried, MA, LPC, is a Licensed Professional Counselor with a holistic counseling practice in Newton, New Jersey. You may visit his website at www.MyHolisticMind.com.

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