

SBH *Insigh*ter

beat the winter blues

Four great ways to cope with Seasonal Sadness!

The short days and long nights of winter can bring down the spirits of even the most positively minded folks. However, for around 5% of Americans, it's more serious: Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD) is a kind of depression that most often occurs during winter. Symptoms generally include depressed mood, loss of energy, increased sleep, loss of interest in work or other activities, social withdrawal, unhappiness, irritability, difficulty concentrating and a tendency to eat more than usual.

Although the cause of SAD is unknown, darker days probably play a part. Decreased amounts of natural sunlight can interfere with the body's internal clock and cause a drop in serotonin, one of the

brain's "feel good" chemicals. Those cases deemed severe may require an anti-depressant to help ease the symptoms. Additional strategies aimed at reducing the negative effects of SAD may include the following:

Go outside Even though it's cold and cloudy, natural light is still one of the best remedies. Getting out into the sunshine within two hours of arising may create best results. Also, open the window shades to let in the light.

Consider light therapy



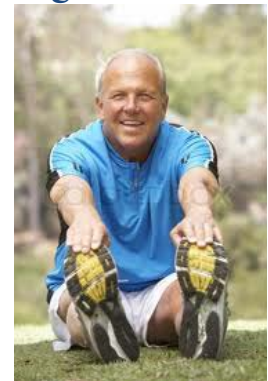
If unable to get outside, exposure to bright light that mimics natural light is thought to positively affect related brain chemicals and ease symptoms. This intervention involves an individual sitting in front of a special lamp for 30 minutes a day. Light therapy can have minor side effects, such as eye strain and headaches, and it isn't recommended for people with skin sensitivity. One should always consult with their primary care physician before starting light therapy.

Spend time with friends and family



Even when you're feeling down in the dumps, make an effort to hang out with people you enjoy. Staying routinely active with your social circle can bolster your spirits and garner needed support.

Eat right and exercise



A heart/brain healthy diet can improve energy levels, and regular physical activity works to boost your mood and ease stress and anxiety, which can aggravate SAD symptoms.



Girard Medical Center Senior Behavioral Health Services

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