

Ward off the ‘winter blues’

By Jim Cornelius
Editor

Preparing for winter means more than blocking your air vents with foam and getting the roof rake and snow shovels out of the shed (see related story, page 3). We also have to prepare ourselves psychologically.

Just about everybody gets down a bit during the winter when it’s dark and cold and our activities are constrained by bad weather. For some people, the season brings something much more serious than the occasional case of “winter blues.” For those affected by Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD), the winter months can be a terrible, dark tunnel.

According to the Mayo Clinic, signs and symptoms of SAD may include:

- Feeling depressed most of the day, nearly every day;
- Losing interest in activities you once enjoyed;
- Having low energy;
- Having problems with sleeping;
- Experiencing changes in your appetite or weight;
- Feeling sluggish or agitated;
- Having difficulty concentrating;

- Feeling hopeless, worthless or guilty;
- Having frequent thoughts of death or suicide.

Symptoms specific to winter-onset SAD, sometimes called winter depression, may include:

- Oversleeping;
- Appetite changes, especially a craving for foods high in carbohydrates;
- Weight gain;
- Tiredness or low energy.

Audry Van Houweling of She Soars Psychiatry notes that “Winter blues affect many of us and can be characterized by decreased energy, motivation, a dampened mood, and weight gain. Seasonal depression or seasonal affective disorder, however, can be downright debilitating characterized by major depression, hopelessness, elevated anxiety, sleep disturbance, and fatigue among other symptoms.”

Women are disproportionately affected by SAD. The reason for this are not well understood, but scientists theorize that it might have something to do with deep-seated evolutionary adaptations to the high-energy demands of pregnancy.

Whatever the reason behind the ravages of

seasonal affective disorder, steps can be taken to push it away or mitigate its impact.

“The physiology of SAD is multi-faceted,” Van Houweling notes. “However, when the dark days of winter descend on us, our sleep-wake cycle — also known as our circadian rhythm — can often be disrupted. Melatonin, the neurotransmitter responsible in part for making us sleepy, can become ‘phase delayed,’ meaning that it is being secreted on the wrong times of day. Evidence has also shown that serotonin, another very important neurotransmitter that supports our mood and regulates anxiety, may be in part dependent on light activation.

She offers some tips to improve your conditions:

- Exercise increases serotonin. Bundle up and exercise — outside ideally. If you do go to a gym or stay home try to do so in daylight and near a window.
- Think about trying a winter sport. Soak up the sun whenever possible. If you are fortunate to have sunlight, try to spend a minimum of 15 minutes outside. If the sun is not an option, think about investing in a SAD lamp.



ISTOCKPHOTO.COM/JULIEF514

Don’t let winter keep you inside — bundle up and get outside if you can.

- Laugh and be merry. But limit the alcohol — alcohol is a depressant.
- Stay centered. Practice meditation, which in itself can improve our brain’s signaling and vitality.
- Eat protein. Amino acids such as L-tryptophan (commonly found in our Thanksgiving turkey) are precursors to neurotransmitters such as serotonin and melatonin.
- Be sure to take your Vitamin D and get your Vitamin D tested! People can be chronically low in Vitamin D, especially in the winter months. I advise

taking at least 1,000 IU daily of Vitamin D3, although some people may need much more to restore healthy levels.

• Seek help from a healthcare provider or counselor. Seasonal affective disorder can be debilitating. Medication, supplementation, and psychotherapy can help with managing symptoms.

Whether simply coping with “winter blues” or facing down the specter of SAD, ’tis the season to take care of yourself and be mindful that winter preparations include our own well-being.

Happy Thanksgiving from all of us!

The Hair Cache 152 E. Main Ave. • 541-549-8771
Jeff • Theresa • Ann • Jamie • Shiela • Terri • Shanntyl • Brittany

The Jewel Sisters 541-549-9388

Blue Moonstone & Diamond

SHE SOARS PSYCHIATRY

Feeling down and tired with winter blues?

We’ll help you get to the root causes with solutions for your mental health.

541-595-8337 • www.shesoarspsych.com
102 E. Main Ave., Downtown Sisters

Audry Van Houweling PMHNP-BC
Quick and Affordable Help

Dr. Thomas R. Rheuben
General, Cosmetic, Implant and Family Dentistry
~ Over 22 years Serving Sisters ~
We are preferred providers for Delta Dental PPO and Premier, MODA, Advantage, Pacific Source, Cigna and the V.A.
541-549-0109 | 304 W. Adams Ave. | Sisters

Let Us Help You Get Through Winter!

Wood Fuel Pellets & Delivery
Insulated Faucet Covers
Foam Vent Plugs
Pipe Insulation
Ice-melt and More!

HOYT'S HARDWARE & BUILDING SUPPLY, Inc.

Hours: M-F 8 to 5, Sat. 8 to 4:30, Closed Sundays
440 N. Pine St. • 541-549-8141 • www.hoyts.net

As you gather together this Thanksgiving, let **Sisters Bakery** fill the dessert on your table

Call **541-549-0361** to order pies, apple crisp, carrot soufflé, homemade dinner rolls, cranberry sauce, and delicious holiday breakfast specialties (cinnamon rolls, scones, muffins, bear claws)

Open Thanksgiving Day 7 to 10 a.m. for order pick-ups, offering limited quantities of breakfast items above.

sisters bakery

251 E. Cascade Ave., Downtown Sisters • Regular Hours: 6 a.m. to 5 p.m. every day