Seasonal Affective Disorder: Winter Blues??

Tis’ the season for joy, happiness, and gratitude, right?! For many people that live with Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD), the winter months are the most challenging time of the year. Seasonal Affective Disorder is a type of depression triggered by changing seasons. About five percent of Americans have Seasonal Affective Disorder, while another 10-15 percent have a milder variation.

There is evidence that changes in sunlight impact our natural production of the chemical serotonin, which is a key hormone in regulating our mood. Changes in sunlight may also impact melatonin, a chemical our body uses to maintain normal sleep patterns and mood. We may find ourselves feeling run down, unmotivated, and fatigued. Other symptoms may include changes in appetite, irritability, anxiety, muscle aches, concentration problems, and trouble with sleep. SAD may be difficult to diagnose, and easily brushed off as the winter blues.

Although mostly associated with winter, Seasonal Affective Disorder, can onset during other seasons, such as Spring and Summer. Individuals with a history of depression or a diagnosis of bipolar disorder may be extra sensitive to the changing season’s impact on their mood.

What are the treatments for SAD?

Talking with your physician about your concerns is a good first step. Antidepressant medication may be an option and evidence suggests that it is effective in treating SAD. Many antidepressants may take several weeks before you notice improvement.

Talk therapy is another good option. A licensed counselor with expertise in treating SAD may help identify negative thinking patterns that fuel depressed mood.

Light therapy is often recommended by doctors and counselors for individuals with winter onset. Exposure to full spectrum/natural light via a lamp triggers the natural production of serotonin and melatonin.

Talk to a doctor about vitamins, specifically vitamin D and A. Although there isn’t definitive evidence for vitamins, many individuals find they help.

What can I do right away?

- Spend more time outside during the day.
- Don’t forget to exercise.
- Avoid misuse of alcohol/drugs.
- Get enough restful sleep.
- Practice and build into your daily routine a healthy relaxation activity that works for you.
There is a life beyond your nose. The first thing Scrooge does when he realizes he’s been given a second chance is to open his window and take in the world around him. In essence, he stops being self-centered only thinking about himself. He engages in life and starts making connections with others.

Live today with the end in mind. Scrooge finally changed when the ghost of yet to come showed him his tombstone. Scrooge came to the realization that spending every waking hour amassing money, property and power meant nothing in the end.

Bonnie Ware, an Australian nurse who spent several years working in palliative care, caring for patients in the last 12 weeks of their lives, wrote a book called *The Top Five Regrets of the Dying*. Below are the five.

- I wish I'd had the courage to live a life true to myself, not the life others expected of me.
- I wish I hadn’t worked so hard and spent more time with my family.
- I wish I’d had the courage to express my feelings.
- I wish I had stayed in touch with my friends.
- I wish that I had let myself be happier.

Like nearly all holiday movies, *A Christmas Carol* reminds us of what is really important.

Overindulging on holiday treats, beverages, and putting off regular exercise was another major source of stress. A close third was the pressure to give the perfect gift to a family member, friend or loved one. The fourth most frequent area of stress was scheduling. In short, finding the time to fit all of the above in a relatively short span of time.

Yes, mostly everyone is stressed but sticking to a budget, maintaining good healthy habits, and letting go of the need for perfection will help you enjoy the season.
## Grief and Bereavement During The Holidays

Grieving during the holidays is difficult because memories are especially strong, and feelings of loss felt more profoundly while watching others enjoy the season. The first step in coping with grief during the holidays is to acknowledge that it is hard. Anticipating this and planning extra supportive strategies can make a difficult time of year easier to get through.

- **Double check your expectations.** Are you taking on too much responsibility for parties, cooking, and decorating? If you are usually the one volunteering, consider giving yourself permission to do less.
- **Use your support system.** Carve out time to spend with people who support and love you. Having a safe group of people to reminisce and share stories with is a healthy way to deal with loss.
- **Don’t cancel your attendance at holiday get-togethers.** Even if for a little while, allow yourself to socialize with others and give yourself permission to leave when you want.
- **Engage in kindness.** We feel good when we help someone else. Even little acts of kindness toward others boosts our own mood and adds value to the holidays.
- **Practice good self-care.** Do something good and healthy for you every day. Avoid overusing alcohol and running yourself to exhaustion. Take breaks and pace yourself.
- **Allow for your feelings.** There is no right or wrong way to grieve. Sadness, joy, anger are all human emotions in bereavement.
- **Create a ritual/tradition that celebrates the deceased and allows you to move through grief.**
- **Seek gratitude.** This is tough when in a funk. Try to find something to be grateful for each day of the holiday season. Write them down, photograph it and share with others on social media.

## Making My New Year’s Resolution Stick...No, For Real This Time

You want to make a positive change going into 2018? You’ve given it thought and this year will be the year! You are determined, committed, and up for the challenge. Unfortunately, most new year’s resolutions are doomed to fail before they begin. Statistic Brain Research Institute published a 2017 study that found that 92% of resolutions fail. Studies say that one’s level of motivation and enthusiasm has little to do with success. Rather, the 8% that succeeded did so by carefully planning their resolution.

- **Pick just one.** Having a single point of change to rally behind is much easier than trying to change multiple things in your life all at the same time. Be perfectly clear, specific, and concrete with what you want changed.
- **Be realistic.** You are more likely to strive if the goal is achievable and not something that shoots for the moon.
- **Put it in writing.** Make a contract with yourself, label the change and place it somewhere as a readily available reminder.
- **Measure progress.** Build in places to track/chart your progress. Visual aids are helpful.
- **Get support.** Lean on those that care about you for the occasional “pep talk.” Partner up with someone with the same or similar goal.
- **Daily action.** Accomplish something concrete toward your goal on a daily basis no matter how small. This keeps momentum going.
- **Create rewards along the way.** Don’t forget to give yourself mini rewards. This is perhaps the most overlooked but most important ingredient. There is a good chance that your goal is far out in the distance. It is easy to give up and give in when the prize is far away. By nature it is difficult to delay immediate gratification and sacrifice something in the now for something that isn’t certain in the future. The further the goal, the more you need rewards along the way.

Be one of the 8% percent that successfully realizes a positive change in 2018!
Co-Parenting During the Holidays

Much of the holidays emphasizes coming together as a family. So, what happens after a divorce or separation? Although difficult, the holidays post divorce/separation can still be enjoyable and memorable for you, your ex-partner, and your children. The following tips may help:

- **Stick to the visitation plan/schedule already agreed upon and in place.** Do NOT put the children in the position to decide who to be with. Having to decide who to be with is often awkward and painful. Also, allowing the opportunity for children to speak with the other parent on the day may help them cope.

- **Compromise.** Be as flexible with the other parent as possible. Resist the urge to punish by being too rigid. Don’t sweat the small stuff.

- **New Traditions.** Children often have fond memories of previous holidays. A divorce/separation doesn’t mean that fun holiday traditions are over. Instead, come up with new ones for the family to enjoy.

- **Get your feelings out somewhere else.** Never vent to your child. Friends, therapists, or even a loving pet can all make good listeners when you need to get negative feelings off your chest.

- **Stay kid-focused.** If you feel angry or resentful, try to remember why you need to act with purpose and grace: your child’s best interests are at stake.

- **Take time for yourself.** Give yourself permission to take care of you. You are not a “bad” parent for taking some time for yourself once in a while.

Sobriety During the Holidays

Staying sober during the holidays may be especially hard given family gatherings, holiday parties, and other social occasions celebrating with substances.

- Plan out each day during the holidays. Be sure to include keeping self-help meetings and appointments with your care providers. Leave nothing to chance.

- Keep at hand a list of supportive people you can call.

- Stay away from people, places, and activities associated with using.

- Exercise regularly.

- Avoid H.A.L.T-Hungry, Angry, Lonely, Tired. These states are often triggers for relapse.

- Stay in the moment. Put down the past and don’t fixate on the future. Simply enjoy the moment. Celebrate your sobriety one day at a time.

EAP Mission Statement

It is the mission of the Employee Assistance Program (EAP) to assist employees who develop behavioral/emotional problems that may directly affect their work performance, and to provide Key Personnel with policy and procedural guidelines for the management of these problems.

City of Milwaukee Events and Reminders

- **Healthy Rewards:** The Healthy Rewards program is underway. Uploading and submitting points documentation can be done via email, fax, at the City’s wellness centers or through the wellness portal. To submit points electronically visit the wellness portal www.workforcehealth.org/cityofmilwaukee and go to the Healthy Rewards Points Submission section and click on ‘Submit your proof of participation’, choose your file and upload.

- **Onsite Nurse Liaison:** Now available to help employees/spouses understand information and follow-up steps from doctor appointments, provide support with a chronic medical condition, assist with claim issues, find the right type of care, and address questions or issues regarding care or treatment. The nurse is located in City Hall on the 8th floor and visits various City locations. This **FREE** service is available to all City of Milwaukee employees and spouses. Call 240-549-9879 or email mari.cohn@uhc.com to schedule an appointment. Walk-ins are welcome.

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