

BEATING THE Winter Blues

DID YOU KNOW?

Women are far more likely to be diagnosed with SAD, but men's symptoms tend to be more severe, according to the Mayo Clinic's website. You are also more susceptible if you previously experienced depression or have a close blood relative who has suffered from depression or another mental health condition. Those who live farther from the equator are also at higher risk.

Story | ANGELA AMBROSE

As winter approaches, the dwindling sunlight and cold, dreary weather can give you the “winter blues.”

If your feelings of sadness and fatigue follow a predictable seasonal pattern, you may have a type of depression called Seasonal Affective Disorder, or SAD.

“We start seeing it at the end of fall when the days get shorter, usually in the North and Northeast parts of the U.S. or areas that are cold, rainy and dark for months in the winter. And during the spring

and summer months, symptoms subside,” says Ani Kalayjian, psychologist, author and professor in the Clinical Psychology Mind, Body, Spirit Program at Teachers College, Columbia University in New York.

Like other forms of depression, symptoms of SAD include excessive fatigue, sleeping more than normal, loss of interest in activities you used to enjoy,

difficulty concentrating and craving for carbohydrates.

When treating patients, Kalayjian uses a holistic approach that focuses on all aspects of a person's health. “We encourage people to have a healthy, balanced life including exercise, which reduces stress and improves the sense of well-being.”

Setting daily goals and scheduling yourself a vacation in a warm climate in the winter months can help recharge your energy. Try to spend more time outdoors, sign up for community service and make regular plans with friends to help elevate your mood.

“You should also pay attention to what you eat because refined carbs make you feel more lethargic and want to stay in bed,” Kalayjian says. Eat lighter foods in the winter months such as vegetables, fruits, salads, nuts,

legumes and soy products, and limit the amount of heavy foods you consume including meat or pasta with heavy cream sauces. Kalayjian also recommends taking daily vitamin D3 supplements to improve symptoms.

A popular treatment for SAD is light box therapy, in which you expose yourself to fluorescent light for 30 minutes in the early morning. The light box simulates natural outdoor light and helps reduce excessive melatonin in your bloodstream to help regulate your mood and sleep patterns.

Making healthy lifestyle changes and using light therapy can help reduce the symptoms of SAD. However, if your depression becomes so severe that it starts interfering with work or school, your doctor may prescribe antidepressants. ♣