

## Season's Greetings

from Human Behavior Associates



### Do the Holidays Get You Down?

Holiday songs tell us "It's the happiest time of the year." While we like to think of this season as a time of joy, festive parties, warm family gatherings, and optimistic hopes for the new year, sometimes our idealized expectations are not met and we end up feeling stressed, let down, disillusioned, alienated, and/or stretched to emotional limits. Pre-holiday stress. Mid-holiday frenzy. Post-holiday letdown. Each of these, or the cumulative effects of them all, can result in a case of the "holiday blues"—or even more serious conditions, such as depression or anxiety disorders.

### Commonly-Experienced Causes of the "Holiday Blues":

Increased levels of stress are invariably cited as one of the biggest contributors to the "holiday blues." In addition to stress, some of the other "oh-so-common" factors that can lead to the "holiday blues" include:

- Fatigue
- Unrealistic expectations
- Feeling bombarded by over-commercialization
- Strained relationship issues that surface when families get together
- Reminders of past losses of significant loved ones
- Sadness over the contrast between "now" and "then"
- Adapting to changes in family configurations and logistics for celebrating together caused by such new situations as divorce, marriage, blended families, adolescents who no longer celebrate the holidays as "children," and grown children establishing their own independent holiday traditions
- Financial constraints and demands
- The inability to be with friends and family
- Residual stress from unfortunate past experiences during previous holiday seasons
- Tension caused by the additional demands of shopping in holiday crowds, heavier-than-usual traffic, entertaining, holiday baking, long-distance travel, family reunions and/or houseguests

### Useful Strategies For Keeping Stress To A Minimum

- *Keep your expectations for the holiday season manageable: Be realistic about what you can and cannot do—as well as what you want to do and don't want to do.*
- *Remember the holiday season does not banish reasons for feeling sad or lonely:*
- *Limit predictable sources of stress- use discretion and limit the activities you commit to.*
- *Don't fall prey to commercial hype. Advertisers would like to have you believe that "if you really loved your spouse" you'd give him or her that expensive \_\_\_\_\_*
- *Get together with friends and family members.*
- *Attend holiday community events.*
- *Join a social group:*
- *Engage in volunteer activity:*
- *Enjoy activities that are free.*
- *Don't abandon healthful habits.*
- *Make the time to get physical exercise.*
- *Remember that life brings changes.*

**Spend Time With Supportive and Caring People** - In all of the ways listed above—as well as any other opportunities you can think of that specifically apply to your life—it cannot be emphasized enough how important it can be to spend the holiday season in the company of supportive and caring people. Many have found that seeking the counsel of a therapist during this time of year provides just the kind of support and care that helps them with the many emotional issues that arise in response to the holidays.



## Winter Depression, SAD.

**What is SAD?** SAD stands for Seasonal Affective Disorder.

Animals react to the changing season with changes in mood and behaviour and human beings are no exception. Most people find they eat and sleep slightly more in winter and dislike the dark mornings and short days. For some, however, symptoms are severe enough to disrupt their lives and to cause considerable distress. These people are suffering from SAD.

### How does it affect people?

Sufferers have to endure most of the following:

- **Sleep Problems** - oversleeping but not refreshed, cannot get out of bed, needing a nap in the afternoon
- **Overeating** - carbohydrate craving leading to overweight
- **Depression** - despair, misery, guilt, anxiety, normal tasks become frustratingly difficult, hopelessness
- **Family problems** - avoiding company, irritability, loss of libido, loss of feeling
- **Lethargy** - too tired to cope, everything an effort
- **Physical Symptoms** - often joint pain or stomach problems, lowered resistance to infection
- **Behavioural problems** - especially in young people

The symptoms tend to start from around September each year, lasting until April but are at their worst in the darkest months.

### What causes it?

The problem stems from the lack of bright light in winter. Researchers have proved that bright light makes a difference to the brain chemistry, although the exact means by which sufferers are affected is not yet known. It is not a psychosomatic or imaginary illness.

### What treatment is there?

As the cause is lack of bright light, the treatment is to be in bright light every day by using a light box or a similar bright light therapy device. (Going to a brightly-lit climate, whether skiing or somewhere hot, is indeed a cure). The preferred level of light is about as bright as a spring morning on a clear day and for most people sitting in front of a light box, allowing the light to reach the eyes, for between 1/4 and 3/4 hour daily will be sufficient to alleviate the symptoms. The user does not have to stare at the light, but can watch TV or read or similar, just allowing the light to reach the eyes.

### Diet and nutrition

A lack of vitamins (particularly some B vitamins) and minerals can also increase feelings of depression so you should avoid things like caffeine and alcohol as these can reduce your vitamin stores, while eating more fruit, vegetables, wholegrain foods, nuts and seeds will help to increase some B vitamins.

In addition, protein-rich foods such as fish and eggs can help to ward off depression because they can help to stabilize your blood sugar levels. Also, the amino acid called tryptophan has been found to increase the production of serotonin. This can be found in fish, turkey, chicken, beans and other legumes and eating carbohydrates such as potatoes and rice can help its absorption.

In addition, herbal teas such as camomile, which is soothing, can relieve anxiety and aid restful sleep, while peppermint is very uplifting.

### Should I talk to my doctor?

Before embarking on any kind of special diet, it is best to consult your GP. We encourage SAD sufferers to seek the support of their doctor.

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### Human Behavior Associates, Inc.

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