



PENNSYLVANIA PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION

416 Forster Street • Harrisburg, Pennsylvania 17102-1748 • Telephone 717-232-3817 • Fax 717-232-7294
<http://www.papsy.org>

What Can I Do About Becoming Depressed During The Winter Months?

By Richard F. Small, Ph.D.

Many people sometimes experience “the blues” during the winter months. This may be due to the cold weather, limitations on recreational activities, or some specific memories that they associate with winter. Many people experience some days of low energy or mild sadness shortly after daylight savings ends in October, or during the cold months of January and February.

There is a great deal of evidence that the actual shortening of daylight affects many people to different degrees. In extreme northern locations, where daylight is only a few hours in length during the winter, many individuals experience significant depression. In more temperate climates, “winter blues” is not a serious problem for most people. Taking up skiing or skating, planning special activities, or accepting the rhythms of life may be sufficient.

A few people experience severe depressive symptoms during the months of short daylight. Children may be cranky and irritable, have temper tantrums, and have difficulty concentrating. Adults are more likely to feel sad, lack energy, and perhaps have changes in their eating or sleeping habits, or in their sex drive. Should these symptoms occur, it is wise to consult a psychologist or other mental health professional. Treatment for this condition, which is called Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD), may include psychotherapy, special light treatment, and/or medication.

Talk to someone who can help. If you would like the name of a qualified psychologist in your area, please try our Psychologist Locator.