

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

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Many people can experience “the blues” during the winter months. There are many factors that could promote this change in mood, such as the cold weather, diminished sunlight, or limitations on recreational activities. People can experience days in which they have low energy or even mild sadness. In many circumstances these changes occur 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 people to different degrees. In extreme northern locations, where daylight is only a few hours in length during the winter, many individuals experience significant depressive symptoms. In more temperate climates, “winter blues” is not a substantial problem for most people. Learning new ways of adapting to the changes, such as taking up seasonally appropriate recreational activities, planning events with friends/family, or implementing more self-care methods may be sufficient.

However, some people may experience more severe depressive symptoms during these months of short daylight. Children may become cranky and irritable, have temper tantrums, and have difficulty concentrating. Adults can be 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 referred to as 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.