

# How to Manage the Winter Blues

People in our society now spend as much as 90 percent of their time indoors. Winter blues can impact over 10% of the population living in middle to northern states. Typically, the winter blues occur gradually beginning in late fall or early winter and goes away during the sunnier days of spring and summer.

This handout will review the signs and symptoms of the winter blues and will detail how to cope with the winter blues. Symptoms of more deleterious conditions will also be reviewed, as well as resources available to help.

## Signs of Winter Blues

- Sadness or irritability.
- Appetite changes, usually increased appetite with cravings for sweets and other carbohydrates.
- Lethargy and weight gain.
- Some loss of interest in pleasurable activities.
- Some isolation of self from friends and family.
- Difficulty concentrating or finishing tasks.

## *What can someone do?*

- Make your environment sunnier and brighter.
- Exposure to full-spectrum bright light from specialized light therapy box.
- Regular aerobic exercise three times a week.
- Get outside
- Get appropriate amount of sleep each night (7 to 8 hours).
- Increased exposure to family and friends.
- Relaxation exercises or measures – get a massage.
- Vacation in someplace sunny.

## *How do you know if it is more than the winter blues?*

- If you are showing signs of depression such as:
  - hopelessness.
  - loss of interest in many activities you once enjoyed.
  - school or work problems.
  - isolating self.
  - suicidal thoughts or behavior.
  - substance abuse.

### ***What can you do?***

- You should meet with your family doctor or primary care provider to assess possible underlying physical conditions.
- You may want to meet with a chaplain or mental health professional to discuss possible options.
- Anti-depressants.
- Phototherapy.
- Talk therapy.

### **Resources**

- Airman & Family Readiness Office: 716-236-3411
- Chaplain Office: 716-236-2395
- Veterans' Crisis Line, 24/7 800-273-TALK (8255), option 1
- Wing Director of Psychological Health Mobile: 716-534-4209
- Military & Family Life Consultants
- VA/Vet Center 716-862-7350
- [www.MilitaryOneSource.com](http://www.MilitaryOneSource.com) 800-342-9647 (24/7)
- [www.WingmanProject.org](http://www.WingmanProject.org)

### **References**

- Heimlich. J.E. (2008). *Seasonal affective disorder*. The Ohio State University Extension – Community Development Fact Sheet. Retrieved October 12, 2011, from <http://ohioline.osu.edu/cd-fact/pdf/0202.pdf>.
- Mayo Foundation for Medical Education and Research (MFMER). (2011). *Seasonal affective disorder (SAD)*. Retrieved October 12, 2011, from <http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/seasonal-affective-disorder/DS00195/METHOD=print>.

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