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## Beating Winter Blues

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Bright lights are essential to combat winter blues.

## Beating Winter **BLUES**

BY WINSTON J. CRAIG

Keep a daily journal of good things that happen to you.

Each year as the days get shorter and colder, and the period of sunlight diminishes, 15 million Americans become challenged by the condition known as Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD). This disorder is characterized by depression, excessive hours sleeping, lack of motivation, social withdrawal, overeating, and weight gain. Since women are four times more likely to report SAD than men, a hormonal cause is suggested. In a recent study, three to five percent of children were found with the disorder.

Persons suffering from SAD tend to eat more carbohydrates in the winter. Chocolates, sweets, and carbohydrate-rich meals may give people with SAD the perception of quick energy. However, an excessive use of simple carbohydrates may pump insulin levels high and push fat production into overdrive. Overeating should be avoided since it can make for a morbid disposition. Adequate sources of omega-3 and folic acid in the diet are important, since deficiencies of these nutrients are associated with depression.

SAD sufferers may have real difficulty motivating themselves to do ordinary things such as exercise, due to low energy levels. However, regular aerobic exercise improves emotional well-being with the release of brain endorphins. Outdoor exercise such as brisk walking has a significant anti-depressant effect on the mind, and helps prevent winter weight gain. Finding a friend to exercise with may be a valuable means to maintain the exercise regime.

In the fight against depression, getting adequate sleep, avoiding fatigue, and managing stress are all important strategies. Bright lights in the home and the work place are essential for those strug-

gling with the winter blues. In addition, getting a massage, watching a comedy, and regularly reflecting upon the blessings received over the past year by keeping a journal are all important strategies. Taking a winter vacation in Florida may be another great way to combat the winter blues.

High levels of social support can cushion the effects of depression. Having the support and friendship of others with SAD may be beneficial since they can share devices and strategies they have found helpful. Unfortunately, depressed people tend to withdraw socially. A recent study found that the happiest students with the fewest signs of depression had the strongest ties to friends and family, and that they were committed to spending quality time with them.

Clinical trials have revealed that St. John's Wort is a safe and effective treatment for mild to moderate depression and anxiety. For effectiveness, the herb must be taken for at least one to two months. In contrast to antidepressants such as Prozac and Zoloft, St. John's Wort produces no side effects when taken in recommended dosage levels.

Winston J. Craig is professor of nutrition at Andrews University.