Time to Lose Those Winter Blues!

Frances L. Gorde, MS, NCC, CEAP, LMHC
Certified Wellness Coach, RYT500
fgorde@efr.org
February 2014

Copyright 2014 Employee and Family Resources. All Rights Reserved.
www.efr.org/eap 1-800-327-4692
Agenda:

• Understand the definition of the “winter blues”
• Discuss signs and symptoms of this type of depression
• Explore causes and risk factors
• Review prevention, treatment options, and resource information
Overview of Depression

• Depressive Disorders are illnesses that involve the body, mood, and thoughts.

• Affects bodily functions such as eating and sleeping, the way one feels about oneself, and the way one thinks about things.
Overview of Depression

- Depression is different than having a “bad day”, or grieving.
- NOT due to personal weakness.
- People generally do not just “get over it.”
What are the “Winter Blues?”

• A type of depression that occurs at the same time each year.
• Related to the seasons, as the days grow shorter, and the amount of available light decreases
• Knowing how to curb these effects can help make the winter months a more productive and enjoyable time of year
Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD)

• An extreme for of the “winter blues”
• Only recently recognized as a specific disorder
• Diagnosed after at least two consecutive year of more intense symptoms
• Usually begins in early 20’s
• The risk for developing it decreases with age
• Four times as many women suffer from SAD as men
• Tends to run in families
Signs and Symptoms

• How do you know if you are just “bummed” or if you might have winter depression (SAD)?

• How do you recognize depression in others? In yourself?
Signs and Symptoms

- Decreased activity level
- Decreased energy level
- Increased sleeping
- Weight gain
- Difficulty concentrating or processing thoughts
- Cravings for sugary or starchy (carbohydrate) foods
- Loss of interest in activities you normally enjoy
- Fatigue
- Irritability
- Social withdrawal
- Low/depressed mood
- Hopelessness
- Helplessness
Possible Causes

• No conclusive tests for SAD

• Lack of sunlight from “shorter days” disrupts our circadian rhythm, or internal body clock

• Lack of sunlight causes the brain to work overtime producing melatonin, the hormone that regulates your body clock and sleep patterns

• Increased melatonin may cause depressive symptoms.

• Note: the production of melatonin increases the more a person spends time in the dark.
Possible Risk Factors

• Gender and age

• Family history

• Prior episodes of depression

• Living farther from the equator
Prevention

• Become aware that change in seasons can impact one’s mood: “Be proactive.”

• Prepare physical surroundings prior to season change – both inside and outside.

• Increase regular exercise.

• Be intentional about nutritional food choices.

• Increase amount of available light in the morning.
Treatment Options

• *Light therapy* – *light box*

• Blues Busters – full spectrum light bulbs

• Consulting with professionals – your EAP counselor, doctor, therapist

• Psychotherapy

• Medication

• *Combination of options*

• Ions in the air
EAP Resources

• 24-hour telephone access to EAP counselors
• (800) 327-4692
• Face-to-Face appointments
• Caring, skilled consultation
• Appropriate referrals
EAP Resources

• Your EAP website: www.efr.org/eap

• Better Living - “Quick access”

• Self assessments, more information on depression.
Other Resources

- National Institute of Mental Health: [www.nimh.nih.gov](http://www.nimh.nih.gov)
- Society for Light Treatment and Biological Rhythms: [www.websciences.org/sltbr](http://www.websciences.org/sltbr)
- Mental Health America: (800-969-6642) [www.MentalHealthAmerica.net](http://www.MentalHealthAmerica.net)
- American Psychological Association: (800) 374-2721 [www.apa.org](http://www.apa.org)
- National Alliance on Mental Illness: (800)-950-6264 [www.nami.org](http://www.nami.org)
- [http://bluesbuster.com](http://www.bluesbuster.com) or (888)-874-7373
Wrap up

• What will you do differently during “SAD season” now?

• Discussion & Questions

• Thank you!