

Winter blues - 'Tis not the season to be jolly

Winter is a time when the pressures of Christmas, miserable weather and reduced opportunity for taking exercise outdoors can take their toll on even the most positive person, leaving them feeling anything but jolly. If you, or someone you know is feeling unusually low this winter, here are some ideas that may help.

COPING WITH FAMILY AFTER CHRISTMAS

Christmas is traditionally a time for families, but close proximity to relatives in perhaps larger bursts than usual can leave you feeling stressed, frustrated and upset.

To get through your next family event with a smile:

Plan in 'me time' - a walk, a trip to the gym or a visit to a coffee shop are good ways to take some time out and get perspective on the situation.

Make sure visitors know how long they can stay - give them a room of their own if possible so they can get some space too.

Organising an activity you can do together outside the house - a relaxing walk or a trip to a local landmark can help release tension and build bridges.

MAKING NEW YEAR RESOLUTIONS

With Christmas over, what better time to review the outgoing year and make positive plans for the future.

List five things you want to achieve this year. It is important these are realistic and specific, e.g. 'join local leisure centre and go swimming twice a week' rather than, 'start swimming more often'. That way there is more chance of achieving your goals and recognising your successes.

WINTER BLUES

Of course there is more to winter, than Christmas and New Year. The gloomy weather and shorter days can have a major impact on mood, making us feel as dark as the sky.

This feeling is increased by our tendency to stay indoors, reducing our exposure to natural light, fresh air and exercise.

According to www.nhs.org.uk, up to one in eight people in the UK experience 'winter blues' - a mild seasonal condition that may result in lethargy, increased appetite and anxiety, so here are some things that may help:

Take up an outdoor hobby such as gardening or a sport. Fresh air coupled with a distraction should help relax body and mind.

Do some exercise.

Indoor and outdoor exercise can help boost energy during the winter.

Eat a balanced diet.

WHEN IT'S MORE THAN 'WINTER BLUES'

If you feel unusually low every winter you may have seasonal affective disorder (SAD) - a type of depression that occurs in a seasonal pattern.

The Seasonal Affective Disorder Association's website, www.sada.org.uk, lists key symptoms as: depression, sleep problems, lethargy, lack of concentration, over eating, loss of libido, anxiety, mood changes and social problems. It says sufferers can experience symptoms any time between September and April, but particularly in December, January and February when days are shortest. Symptoms typically disappear or gradually reduce with the arrival of spring.

Treatments for SAD include: light therapy, using a special light box; antidepressants; and talking treatments with a counsellor or psychotherapist. Those who think they have SAD, should consult their GP about a treatment plan, which may consist of some or all of the above treatments. The GP will also want to rule out any other possible conditions which may be causing the symptoms.

LOOKING FORWARD

It seems for many of us, feeling tired and low in the winter is a fact of life, but taking positive steps to get help, spending time outdoors, eating healthily and taking exercise can really boost our chances of enjoying the season, even if we enjoy it that little bit less than summertime!

MORE INFORMATION

To find out more about therapy and coaching at our First Psychology centres, or to arrange an initial session, contact your local centre:

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