

## Winter Blues

Do you find yourself feeling a bit more blue this time of year? You aren't alone. With the cooler temperatures, shorter days, less activity, and the stress the holidays can bring, many of us struggle. If this blue feeling is short lived and you are still able to enjoy the things that normally make you happy, it is probably normal. However, some may find themselves diagnosed with what is called Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD). This disorder is a form of depression that onsets with the changing of the seasons. Onset typically occurs in the fall or winter and goes away with the arrival of Spring.

According to the National Institute of Mental Health, the federal agency for research on mental disorders, a person may be diagnosed with SAD if they experience symptoms of major depression that occur seasonally for at least two consecutive years. SAD affects about 9% of those living in our geographical area. Not everyone has a formal diagnosis of this. Symptoms may include sleeping or eating too much, withdrawing from social contact, feeling depressed nearly every day, feeling hopeless or worthless, being unable to focus and not having any energy.

It is important during this time to give ourselves some grace. Some may have general anxiety or depression that may be heightened in the fall or winter months. Others may experience periods of these symptoms but are able to manage and cope with it. Be sure to check in on your loved ones this time of year that may have a general dislike of this season, or those who are in a difficult season of life.

So, how does SAD affect heart health? Similarly to people who struggle with depression year-round, those with seasonal depression may smoke, drink, and or eat more. All of which can have negative affects on the heart. Many will also feel little energy, leading to less activity, exercise, and socialization.

What are some ways to combat the winter blues? Make time for socializing with family and friends. This is what the holidays are about, after all. You will feel better for having seen them.

Be sure to continue to participate in hobbies and activities that bring you joy.

Go for a walk outside! Sunshine is the best medicine, and it will help your metabolism and strengthen your heart.

Prayer or meditation is proven to be a great coping mechanism for many as well.

Seek therapy if you need it, whether this be medication or talking to a provider.

## Holidays

This time we will be discussing the Holiday trifecta of food, drinks, and stress.

The Holidays are meant for us to be together with family and eat some delicious food. Sometimes (most of the time), that involves days of laying around, having a few drinks, eating more than we should, and spending time with family and friends.

Some things to consider:

Are you on a salt or water restricted diet? For some, one day of indulgence, such as eating foods high in salt (ham) or drinking too much, could make your blood pressure rise and increase swelling and other problems. For others, one day probably won't impact your overall health, but repetitively indulging in rich food and drinks can lead to the formation of bad habits.

Can I make some healthy swaps for my meals? This could mean making Turkey instead of ham, using low sodium seasoning options in your side dishes, and including more fruit desserts instead of baked goods. Replacing butter with margarine or cooking oil and using low or no-fat dairy options are ways to help limit our fat and sodium intake as well.

When are my get togethers? Late night get togethers leave us feeling stuffed and sedentary. This doesn't allow much time afterwards for exercise to help our metabolism process excess calories we may have indulged in.

How many parties/get togethers am i going to have? If you have multiple in a day, or multiple weekends filled with get togethers, try and eat smaller portions or make good decisions at at least one of the meals. If you are having a large Christmas meal, be sure to put the food away afterwards (this is good for preventing foodborne illness too!) so snacking is minimized. Also, be sure to eat a full, healthy breakfast so you aren't ravenous by the time lunch or supper roll around.

For some, the overindulgence we experience around the holidays is heightened by stress felt around the season. Yes, the holiday can be stressful for some, whether it be due to tight finances, busy schedules, or hosting your in laws. We may cope with stress by eating or having too many alcoholic beverages. Make sure this holiday season, you cope with stress in a healthy way. Be sure to do things this holiday season that make you happy- listen to Christmas music, and spend time with family and friends, and try to get outside as much as possible. The best gift you can give yourself is the gift of health, mind, body, and spirit.

If you or your family is facing financial hardship this winter, reach out to your County's Social Services, or find a food pantry in your area.