



HEALTHQUEST

A QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER FOCUSING ON
MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES AND CONCERNS.

IT'S BEGINNING TO LOOK A LOT LIKE... WINTER

Sentiments toward Winter are as varied as the temperatures that often accompany the season. For the many people who dislike winter, the days and months can seem long and sometimes dismal as they contemplate and await the change of season.

A major difference between people who are fond of winter and those that are not is that the 'Blissful with Winter' types can usually be found participating in activities that take advantage of the northern winter elements - Pleasure Skating; Downhill & Cross Country Skiing; Tobogganing; Snowboarding; Snowmobiling; Playing Hockey; Figure Skating...

While these outdoor sports are attractive to some, they may not be as attractive or easily accessible to others. The **key to contentedness** with Winter is not so much the nature of the activities one engages in but rather **the act of 'being active'**.

Participating in pleasurable activities provides us with a sense of energy and vitality that contribute to our overall health and well-being. For these benefits, we encourage people to identify and establish activities that become personal hallmarks for appreciating and looking forward to Winter.

ACT ON 'BEING ACTIVE' SOME IDEAS TO CONSIDER

LEARNING: set a goal to learn something new and out of the ordinary each winter... for instance - each year, choose a country and become immersed in information about that country's history, geography,

language, culture, or economy! Or build on knowledge from year to year by learning more about a topic that interests you. The beauty of learning is that it can be done independently through reading, using CD ROM's and tapes or through attending general interest classes such as those offered through community programs.

RELATING: connect with family and friends through simple outings that become 'Winter Rituals'. "Every winter we go to the farmers market together and... ; "Every winter we rent a subtitle movie and..." "Every winter we visit our out-of-town relatives and ..."

EXERCISING: avoid the temptation to become sedentary through committing to a short and brisk walk daily - preferably out-doors for the added benefit of 'fresh air'. A varied exercise program doubles as both a pastime and assists with regulating our mood. Variety helps to keep motivation high - *for example* - attend classes or use videotapes; seek out nature trails for long walks; swim at the local pool; take up yoga or boxing.

CONTRIBUTING: one way to assure a 'good feeling' and to look forward to a commitment is by contributing to the well-being of others and this is easily achieved through volunteering. Most communities have a central agency that coordinates volunteer opportunities providing access to a wide range of options to meet an individual's area of interest and time commitment.

CREATING: *knitting; clogging; pottery; singing; carving; sculpting; painting; refinishing furniture; writing a poem; baking...* the list is endless! Creating opportunities to express our creativity through any number of forms can contribute to a full-filling winter

season and give rise to anticipation and excitement for the winter to follow.

PLANNING: reaping the benefits of an active and enjoyable winter does not occur by chance - but rather by design. Planning in advance how we will spend our winter weeks and months is an essential step to making things happen!

MORE THAN THE 'WINTER BLAHS'... SEASONAL AFFECTIVE DISORDER

Many people experience an extreme and prolonged form of the 'winter blahs' that is related to dramatic changes in their brain's chemistry, triggered by diminished sun exposure. This disorder is formally known as **Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD)** with SAD sufferers experiencing cyclical symptoms beginning in the Fall and often persisting until late Spring.

Symptoms of SAD are quite similar to those of depression as well as some other ailments with the distinguishing feature of SAD being the **seasonal time frame**.

SAD sufferers frequently experience:

- ▲ feelings of sadness
- ▲ tiredness and fatigue during the day
- ▲ cravings for carbohydrates with overeating and weight gain
- ▲ a loss of interest in things usually pleasurable
- ▲ a decline in sex drive

Individuals experiencing feelings of sadness or any of the other symptoms noted above are encouraged to seek the assistance of a physician or a professional counsellor.

LIGHTENING SYMPTOMS OF SAD THROUGH 'LIGHT THERAPY'

For those diagnosed with SAD, significant improvement of symptoms has been experienced through a treatment plan that may include *antidepressant medications, light therapy* or *professional counselling* and often a combination of the three interventions.

Light therapy has been found to be useful in relieving

symptoms of SAD, with the intensity of the light source as well as distance from the light source varying according to individual needs. Spending as little as a half-hour each morning exposed to prescribed lighting levels has lightened the symptoms of many SAD sufferers.

PROFESSIONAL EAP COUNSELLING... FOR SAD AND THE NOT SO SAD SUFFERERS

For individuals with **Seasonal Affective Disorder:** Professional EAP Counsellors work collaboratively with other health care providers to assist individuals with SAD. EAP Counsellors assist by providing emotional support and can help individuals develop strategies for managing the 'feelings of sadness' associated with SAD and for improving the quality of their day to day life.

EAP COUNSELLING FOR ANY REASON - ANY SEASON

Just as predictable as nature's changing seasons, life presents most of us with problems from time to time that are distressing. The EAP is available to assist individuals who are feeling saddened or distressed for any reason - even for reasons not readily known to them. And through any season. Many people have benefited from the professional assistance offered by an EAP Counsellor. We welcome and encourage you to access the EAP at a time of need.

If you have any questions about this topic, or if you wish to discuss a personal situation you may be experiencing, we invite you to contact your EAP counsellors to arrange a telephone or in-person counselling session.

All contact between you and your counsellor is completely confidential.

English Service: 1-800-387-4765
French Service: 1-800-361-5676
General Information: 1-888-814-1328

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The EAP Professionals