

The Winter Blues

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There is nothing quite like feeling the warmth of the sun on your skin, breathing in the scent of a beautiful day, and enjoying the rush of happy thoughts. Unfortunately, these experiences most often occur on sunny summer days. Needless to say, Grand Rapids Michigan is not well known for its many sunny days, especially during the winter months. This doesn't mean we can't still experience happiness without the sun, it is simply more difficult.

At howstuffworks.com there is an informative web page* explaining the ups and downs of sunlight and its affects. The article references some solid research related to this subject:

"People actually get depressed, with symptoms like sadness, fatigue and hopelessness -- from a lack of sunlight. The form of depression most often associated with variations in sunlight is seasonal affective disorder (SAD). The disorder runs in cycles of depression and wellness that follow the seasons -- more specifically, the availability of sunlight. Someone with SAD might feel perfectly fine in spring and summer, and then experience a severe downturn in mood when fall hits. They'll stay that way through the winter, until the sun comes out again in full force. SAD is particularly prevalent in parts of the world with little winter daylight and/or extended overcast periods, like Alaska or the U.S. Northwest."

The majority of individuals who have mood swings during the darker winter months do not have Seasonal Affective disorder. It is quite natural to tolerate some down days throughout the year and especially when we get less sunlight.

Here are a few ideas for shaking the winter blues:

Bundle up and get out! - The sun is still here during the winter months we just neglect to take advantage of it due to the cold and snow. Have a snowball fight, go sledding, ski, or build a snowman.

Open the blinds - Natural light is sun light. Opening the blinds in your home and uncovering any window will allow natural sunlight and help boost your mood.

Exercise and Nutrition - Yes, as always your body needs to get moving in order to recharge and wake-up. Take a walk around the block just don't forget your coat and scarf. Make sure to eat balanced meals rich in fruit and vegetables.

Socialize - The winter months drive us inside and away from people. Making time to spend time around other people can also improve your mood. Sometimes just chatting with someone else about the long dark winter can boost your mood versus sitting alone at home enduring the winter.

Even with these strategies sometimes you just need to talk to someone. If you or your student is struggling with feelings of sadness or depression please seek help through counseling services. Encourage your student to try out the free and confidential counseling services at Aquinas through the Career and Counseling Department. Counselors can be reached by calling (616) 632-2905 or by stopping in the lower level of the Donnelly Center.

* <http://health.howstuffworks.com/mental-health/human-nature/happiness/sun-happiness.htm/printable>