

12-5-08 Seasonal Affect Disorder

Are you feeling kind of blue and blah? If you are, it is worth your while to think about the cause of your sadness. Write the thoughts down and share them with a friend. If you are not willing to share them just yet, say your written words out loud. Hearing your thoughts out loud allows them to be processed by your brain in way that is different from just seeing the words on paper. If you can't come up with a reasonable cause of your sadness, such as a recent important loss, then maybe it is time to consider another cause. Ask yourself if this feeling has occurred before. When did it start? Is it every year at about the same time?

If you can't arrive at a reasonable explanation for your lethargy and you believe you've experienced this before after the clocks were turned back or with the onset of cold dark skies, consider talking to your doctor about Seasonable Affect Disorder.

While S. A. D. is usually associated with young adults, children can also be victims of this neurological and chemical mood disorder. I know this because one of my children suffered from it. I watched with concern as this energetic enthusiastic child became tired and less capable in the early winter when first grade required her to be in school all day. By her third grade, I thought it was worse. I thought about it and recalled that a year earlier there were similar symptoms at the same time of the year. I remember thinking, "Could this be seasonal affect disorder? Nah. She's too young." When I saw it happening again, though, I decided to discuss this with the pediatrician.

I made the appointment and described the symptoms. She shared the concerns and gave me some names of some people providing psychological support, since this is a recognized clinical mood disorder. We talked about light therapy and discussed the possibility of medication if this usually full of life girl was not feeling better soon.

On her way out the door, the pediatrician said, "OK. I'll look into the lights and you're going to look into the psycho-pharm and let me know what you think." I nodded in agreement and the door closed. My daughter waited a moment, looked up at me and said, "I don't understand. Why do I have to go to a Psycho Farm?"

While the words may be pronounced the same, the context and spelling gives them very different meanings! Poor thing. The whole time I was discussing her symptoms and the possible treatments, she was thinking I was sending her off to a camp for children with psychological disorders!

My daughter's confession of concern was a humorous wake up call and we decided to try light therapy and fresh air and exercise as often as possible, instead of jumping right into medication for some unproven chemical imbalance. Light bulbs labeled as "full spectrum" replaced the regular light bulb in her room and I continuously encouraged her to bundle up and get outdoors. It did the trick and I often think of those lessons learned. We can all benefit from fresh air, exercise and sunlight.

Research also shows that watching movies with lots of sun and blue skies also helps to relieve the symptoms of Seasonal Affect Disorder. I had not heard of this when I was attempting to help my daughter. Isn't that interesting, though? Isn't it wild but believable that our minds can be fooled like that? I suppose, though, that it is not so very different from visiting a support group, practicing positive thinking and guided imagery exercises. Our thoughts create actual changes in our body's chemistry. That goes for

negative thoughts, also. It is worth it to listen to our inner dialogues to see how often we are critical of or accepting of ourselves.

It is easy to buy some full spectrum light bulbs but choosing what movies to watch? Now that might take some research! Will it be *Lawrence of Arabia*, *The Endless Summer* (a great title but boring movie despite its cult following) or *Eternal Sunshine*?

How about music? I think making a play list specifically for this time of year is a great idea and would make a nice gift for anyone. I know I am dating myself but here's some selections on my list: *Mr. Blue Sky* by the Electric Light Orchestra, Willie Nelson singing *Blue Skies*, Louis Armstrong singing *What A Wonderful World*, *Let The Sun Shine in* by The Fifth Dimension, *Walking on Sunshine* by Katrina and The Wave and to make me smile and laugh, *Super Freak* (the Roca sound mix) by Rick James and to sing along with, Donovan's *Sunshine Superman*. Oh, what the heck, I'll toss in a couple contemporary songs, too. Consider Sufjan Steven's *No Man's Land* and Ingrid Michaelson's *Be O.K.* (nice little You Tube flick, also).

Cathleen Drinan is the health agent for the Town of Halifax. She wants to hear your suggestions for handling Seasonal Affect Disorder. What movies would you watch? What music would you add to the list? She can be reached at 781 293 6768 or cdrinan@town.halifax.ma.us