

Do you find it hard to get up most mornings, do you crave carbohydrates and feel unlike your usual happy self?

If so, you're not alone. Seven per cent or more of the population suffers from the winter blues, also known as Seasonal Affective Disorder.

SAD is a type of winter depression that affects an individual between September and April but the symptoms are most prominent during December, January and February, and are believed to be caused by a biochemical imbalance in the hypothalamus due to the shortening of daylight and the lack of sunlight in the winter.

Nerve centres in our brain controlling our daily rhythms and moods are stimulated by the amount of light entering our eyes.

As night falls the pineal gland starts to produce a substance called melatonin that tells our body clock it's night time. Bright light at daybreak is the signal for the gland to stop producing this melatonin.

On dull winter days, especially when indoors, not enough light is received to trigger this waking up process. Therefore the shorter autumn days set off a chain of hormonal reactions starting in the pineal gland in the centre

of the brain, which responds to growing darkness by producing the hormone melatonin.

Light is also linked to serotonin a neurotransmitter in the brain, and the main chemical that improves mood.

Low serotonin can cause depression.

Evidence has shown that serotonin levels increase with exposure to bright light – and it can also be increased naturally in the body by how we think and what we eat.

The key to understanding the connection between the food we eat and our mood and level of alertness lies in understanding a little about how the brain functions.

The neurotransmitters that are most sensitive to diet and influential in affecting mood

from one nerve cell to the next. These chemicals, called neurotransmitters, are made in the brain from the food we eat.

It is well known that what we eat affects how we feel. Specific food directly affects

are serotonin, norepinephrine and dopamine – and low levels of these transmitters heightens depressive symptoms.

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brain chemicals and what and when we eat affects blood sugar levels, both of which play havoc with our moods.

Unfortunately, bad moods can affect our food choice, so vicious cycles can get set up contributing to the depression habit spiral.

Follow this advice to eat yourself happier:

Advertising Feature

Choose tryptophan and tyrosine rich proteins.

Numerous studies have shown that people who suffer from depression may benefit by eating a diet rich in Omega 3, which is a essential fatty acid and are found in food such as oily fish (sardines, mackerel, salmon) nuts and linseeds.

The human body is unable

to make Omega 3 which is

another reason why this

winter we should aim to

increase our intake to ward off those winter blues.

Eat more foods rich in Vitamin D.

This vitamin is produced in the skin after exposure to ultraviolet light from the sun or artificial sources. Vitamin D can also be found naturally in a small range of foods such as eggs, oily fish, and milk, margarine and meats.

One theory of the cause of SAD is the link between low levels of Vitamin D due to lack of exposure to sunlight during the winter months. There is some evidence that low vitamin D levels may be connected to SAD.

Research has shown

vitamin D appears to increase

levels of serotonin in the brain

which may help to relieve

depressive symptoms.

The relationship between vitamin D, depression and the sun is not completely clear. Therefore, you should always consult your doctor before adding the supplements to your diet, as high levels of vitamin D could become toxic or interfere with other medications you are taking.

If you think you are suffering

with SAD consult your GP.

For more information and

support contact the Seasonal

Affective Disorder

Association at

www.sada.org.uk.

Charlotte Turner is a Bristol-based dietitian, with a degree in Dietetics from Kings College London. She



Seasonal Affective Disorder

Eat yourself out of the winter blues

Later this month the clocks will go back an hour. It will mean we have to wake up in the dark – for sufferers of the winter depressive condition known as Seasonal Affective Disorder, it will mean can mean the start of months of misery. However, Bristol-based nutritionist Charlotte Turner says eating correctly can you to cope

SAD symptoms and causes

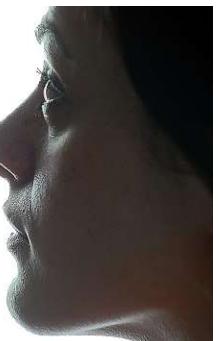
Most people will be getting out of ordinary domestic lighting is beneficial. It is best to embark upon light therapy in early autumn when the first symptoms appear.

Some antidepressant drugs

such as the non-sedative Selective Serotonin Reuptake Inhibitor (SSRI) are effective in alleviating the depressive symptoms of SAD and combine well with light therapy.

The SSRI's are a class of antidepressants that work by increasing the level of the neurotransmitter serotonin in the body.

Correct nutrition can also play an important role in helping SAD sufferers to cope with their condition.



Light therapy has been shown to be effective in up to 85 per cent of diagnosed SAD cases.

Exposure for up to four hours per day (average one to two hours) of very bright light at least ten times the intensity



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