

BUILDING HEALTHY FAMILIES



Bye-Bye Winter Blues



Here in upstate New York, cold winters and limited sunshine can affect a parent's mood.



This can be especially true following the excitement of holidays filled with activities and social events.

As families return to everyday routines that babies and young children crave, parents can feel lethargic, sad, and even depressed.

According to the December issue of the National Responsible Fatherhood Clearinghouse Newsletter, an estimated 10 million Americans experience symptoms of Seasonal Affective Disorder, or SAD. They may include low energy and decreased activity, overeating, weight gain, social withdrawal, and the inability to focus.

Long-lasting and significant symptoms of SAD should be discussed with a medical professional. Ask your home visitor for area practitioners if you need help locating a professional.

For most parents, there are a number of natural remedies that can help to shake off wintertime blues.



Increase Sun Exposure

Research suggests that brain chemistry, including production of the "feel-good" chemical serotonin, may be impacted by a lack of sunshine and / or vitamin D.



Dressing appropriately for weather and finding activities to enjoy outside during the winter months can benefit the entire family.

Eat a Healthy Diet

Foods high in protein like lean meats and nuts supply energy. Sugary foods and simple carbohydrates such as white bread and crackers can create feelings of sluggishness. Fried foods, processed foods, and alcohol are known to dampen the mood, while foods rich in Vitamin D like milk and eggs can lift spirits.

Keep a Sleep Schedule

Proper nutrition additionally supports healthy sleep. Maintain a consistent sleep schedule to combat the changes in daylight hours and to prevent mood swings and depression.

Exercise Regularly

Exercise relaxes the body and releases endorphins, more "feel-good" hormones. Regular exercise can boost immunity, help reduce the impact of stress, and increase overall feelings of happiness.

Think Positively

Discover what cold winter days offer, rather than focusing on discomfort. A positive attitude harnesses excitement and increases joy! The next page has activity ideas to get started!



IS THERE SNOW?:

- * Make tracks in the snow, play follow the leader, find animal footprints
- * Create a snow character, build a snow fort and enjoy a snack inside
- * Draw and write with twigs; aim at a target with snowballs
- * Fill a spray bottle with water and food coloring to get artistic (it stains!)
- * Fill sand buckets, pots and pans, and cups with snow to create shapes
- * Practice using tools to sweep or shovel; bury treasures to find
- * Add water to a snow pile and slide on a garbage bag (supervise closely!)

NO SNOW & TEMPERATURE ABOVE 30°?:

- * Explore on a walk, talk about what you see, skip for awhile, run, jump, or walk backwards
- * Look for icicles, animals, birds, things that are brown, things that fly, things that are big, etc.
- * Watch what happens when you blow bubbles in cold air (ask your visitor about bubble recipes!)
- * Bundle up and visit a park
- * Ask to make a bird feeder with your home visitor; be sure to keep it filled with seed all winter!



INDOORS TODAY or TEMPERATURE BELOW 30° ?:

- * Make an obstacle course using pillows for babies, things for toddlers to step over and around, and cut out footprint shapes for preschoolers to follow
- * Have an indoor picnic, sitting on the floor
- * Put on some music and move different ways (ask your visitor for finger plays and baby games!)
- * Fill a container or pot with water, rice, or cereal and hide items and count (supervise closely!)
- * Let your child pretend to work at a store, library, school, bank, garage and then change roles
- * Snuggle up and read books or make your own (ask your visitor for ideas!)