



CENTRE COUNTY PREVENTION COALITION
A SAMHSA Funded Drug-Free Community Coalition
Supported By Centre County Drug and Alcohol



February 2009 – Winter Blues

Elizabeth Eckley is the Community Mobilizer for Centre County *Communities That Care*. This weekly column, published on Wednesdays, is a collaboration of Centre County *Communities That Care* serving Bald Eagle, Bellefonte, Penns Valley, and Philipsburg-Osceola Area School Districts, and Care Partnership: Centre Region *Communities That Care* serving the State College Area School District.

Are you feeling blue?

During the winter months, many individuals of all ages fall into a depressed mood and continue to feel depressed until the early spring when their symptoms begin to disappear. Unstable melatonin levels, a hormone produced during sleep, and serotonin, a neurotransmitter responsible for mood, hunger and sleep, cause the winter blues.

As the hours of daytime sunlight decrease, winter blues sufferers begin to experience changes in their ability to concentrate, their energy levels and their moods. People experiencing the winter blues are presented with everyday challenges because of changes in the way they think, react and sleep.

People who experience two or more of these symptoms may be suffering from the winter blues: increased feelings of lethargy, difficulty performing tasks that are normally simple and enjoyable, increased craving for carbohydrate-rich foods, difficulty waking up in the mornings as the days get shorter and incorrectly blaming oneself for things that go wrong.

Women are also affected nearly four times more than their male counterparts and nearly 25% of all college students suffer from the winter blues as well.

There are, however, steps that can be taken to decrease the affects of the winter blues. Bring more light into your life. Make an effort to expose yourself to sunlight in the early morning. The more light you can experience during the day, the better you will feel. Try to get up earlier in the winter to take full advantage of the daytime sun. If you can't get up earlier, try to go outside periodically through the day or sit by a large window, even on cloudy days.

Aerobic exercise has been proven to reduce stress and improve mood. Going skiing, taking a brisk walk to class, or heading to the gym can positively impact people suffering from the winter blues.

Instead of eating junk food and sugars that our body craves during the winter months, try to eat larger portions of complex carbohydrates like wheat pasta and brown rice. Also try simple carbohydrates like fruits and fruit juices to avoid instant relief that leads ultimately to decreased energy.

A regular, 8-hour sleeping schedule is also important. By having a regular sleeping schedule you will have increased energy during the day and reduce feelings of depression that stem from irregular sleeping patterns.

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