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Magazine

WINTER AND OUR MENTAL HEALTH

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WHAT DO YOU THINK OF WINTER? DO YOU LOVE THE SEASON AND LOOK FORWARD TO IT, OR DO YOU FLAT OUT LOATHE IT? TANYA CURTIS LOOKS AT THE IMPACT OF WINTER ON OUR MENTAL HEALTH AND PROVIDES FIVE WAYS TO KEEP THE WINTER BLUES AT BAY.

What does winter mean to you? When I think of winter I think of Ugg boots, jackets, scarfs, electric blankets, heaters and fireplaces. I also think of the shorter days and longer nights – mostly only seeing outside in nighttime with early starts and late finishes.

Some people I asked said they think of home weekends, board games and hearty foods such as stews and soups. One person said that winter reminds them of hibernation, withdrawal, overeating and sometimes depression and a parent shared that winter means “ratty kids” to her.

Other people commented on the relief from the heat and there was a large number of people who focused on the negative of winter, sharing that their moods fluctuate more in winter than any other seasons.

I started to ponder – why is it that a certain theme of unwanted behaviours begin to appear in winter:

- Withdrawal
- Hibernation
- Moodiness
- Overeating
- Ratty kids
- Depression

Our culture is one of the outdoors – more so in spring, summer and autumn and less so in winter. We have nature’s playground at our fingertips. Heading off to beaches, camping, outdoor walks etc is very common in our warmer months yet for many, this can go by the way side in winter?

During our day-to-day activity in the warmer months we are receiving some of the best

natural medicine that can exist - a good, hearty dose of nature and a natural absorption of the most amazing and very much needed light - our sunlight.

Winter for many sees the reduction of outdoor activity, less exposure to the sun and reduced activity with God’s natural playground. Is it possible that our interaction with nature and sunlight is having an impact on our mood? Is it possible that if we reduce our exposure to nature and our world’s natural light that we also impact negatively on our psychological wellbeing – our moods – our mental health and our behaviours?

FIVE TIPS FOR WANTED MOODS AND BEHAVIOURS THIS WINTER

1 Take your body to the sunshine. Use your lunch break wisely and take a walk in sunlight. There is much research that supports the positive effects that sunlight has on our mental health.

2 Connect with nature. A regular walk in nature is one of the soul’s best medicines. If we can’t make it day time, rug yourself up and take a small stroll outside before bed. Admiring the stars is a great way to remind us of the bigger universe we are all part of.

3 Eat for what your body needs. Reduced activity does not mean increased food intake. Eat only what the body is needing and not what the mouth is wanting.

4 Connect with people. For some, hibernating in the colder months often means reducing contact with people. Although it is supportive to have time out – staying connected to people is supportive for so many reasons.

5 Keep your natural routine and rhythms. It is easy to let our familiar patterns slide. Unfortunately this results in anxiety and feelings of unease. Maintaining our naturally routine and rhythms builds a consistency and trust – essential ingredients for quality mental health.

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