Here comes the sun!

There came a day during my first winter in Delft in 2019 that I finally understood the meaning of the song ‘Here Comes the Sun’ by the Beatles. Prior to this, I always wondered how sunlight made anyone so happy and affected their mood so profoundly. I finally began to comprehend what seasons are and how they can affect my mood.

I hail from a city in India where the temperature variation is between 10-35 C at all times of the year. I am so used to seeing the sun every day of my life that I believe I began to take it for granted. The sunrise is what began my day and the sunset is what ended. The time variation in these two processes was almost negligible back home.

As an international student who was experiencing seasons such as autumn and harsh winters for the first time in my life, I can vouch that it isn’t easy coping with any of it. The lack of sunlight and the gloomy weather made my mood take a huge dip. I became increasingly lethargic and inactive as the autumn set in. I began feeling hopeless and spent most of my time indoors without seeing the sunlight or any people. Little did I know that this was a real issue until I heard about ‘Seasonal Affective Disorder’ or SAD and connected it to everything I was experiencing. I started looking into it and the results took me by sheer surprise.

A view of a building

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During my search for answers, I learnt that exposure to sunlight can trigger more physical changes than I could have imagined. Research has shown that moderate exposure to sunlight can boost the levels of serotonin produced in the human body. Also known as the ‘happiness hormone’, serotonin can improve one’s mood and focus dramatically. I saw this happen in real life when the sun peeked out from behind the clouds after a long, gloomy week and I saw the smile on my face return. I immediately began feeling cheerful and happy and got a considerable amount of work done on sunny days. The warmth of sunshine spread all the way to my heart.

Being used to a fixed sunrise and sunset timing, coping with the changing daylight timings really affected my sleep cycle and made me restless due to lack of sleep. There were entire nights when I just lay in bed, wide awake as sleep continued to evade me. This lack of sleep made me highly irritable and affected my studies. I was unable to focus in classes or during studying at home. This was when I found out that exposure to sunlight also has an effect on the body clock or the circadian rhythm. The melatonin produced by the human body at night is directly proportional to the amount of sunlight exposure during the day. It dictates the circadian rhythm in the body by improving the amount of sleep and reducing stress levels. With changes in the period of daylight exposure, my natural circadian rhythm was disrupted- causing side-effects such as depression and hopelessness.

Lastly, sunshine has a major effect on the ‘sunshine vitamin’ or Vitamin D. This realization struck me when my academic counsellor advised me to take Vitamin D supplements and explained the reason behind it to me. Vitamin D promotes calcium absorption and is required for bone growth and formation. Exposure to the sun helps to convert inactive Vitamin D levels to active. At the same time, I was curious about why I kept catching colds frequently and they refused to leave my body for a long time. The winter had just begun and I was well-aware that the temperatures were going to dip further. It was high time for me to brace myself and strengthen myself. Another surprising and less known correlation that I learnt about was between the levels of Vitamin D in our body and our immunity. It acts as an important trigger to the immune system when present in sufficient amounts. With lack of the ‘sunshine vitamin’, my immunity took a dip too.



“Little darling, it's been a long cold lonely winter  
Little darling, it feels like years since it's been here

Here comes the sun (doo doo doo)  
Here comes the sun, and I say  
It's all right

Little darling, the smiles returning to the faces  
Little darling, it seems like years since it's been here”

The lyrics of the song “Here Comes the Sun” by the Beatles now play in my head on every sunny during these long and cold winters in Delft. And I finally understand the meaning the reason behind the happiness and the warmth that sunshine brings along with it.