**Got the Winter Blues?**

In any given year about 5% of the U.S. population experiences Seasonal Depression, and four out of five of these individuals are women. If you live in the northern U.S. your likelihood of experiencing the “winter blues” is closer to 1 out of 10.

The National Institute of Mental Health says symptoms of seasonal depression can include:

* Depression: feelings of misery, guilt, loss of self-esteem, hopelessness, diminished interest in activities, despair, and apathy
* Anxiety: tension and inability to tolerate stress
* Mood changes: extremes of mood and, in some, periods of mania in spring and summer
* Sleep problems: desire to oversleep and difficulty staying awake or, sometimes, disturbed sleep and early morning waking
* Lethargy: feeling of fatigue and inability to carry out normal routine
* Overeating: craving for starchy and sweet foods resulting in weight gain
* Social problems: irritability and desire to avoid social contact
* Sexual problems: loss of libido and decreased interest in physical contact

**What To Do**

Reduced levels of sunlight in the fall and winter months may affect your serotonin, a neurotransmitter that affects mood. To naturally boost your serotonin:

* Avoid sugars and starchy foods. Yes, you will crave them, but they can cause and increase your symptoms. Satisfy your sweet tooth with stevia or lakanto, zero calorie sweeteners that do not raise blood sugar and can benefit your health.
* Get enough vitamin B6. Foods that are rich in B6 include spinach, turnip and mustard greens, garlic, cauliflower, celery, fish (tuna, salmon, cod, snapper), poultry and lean beef tenderloin.
* Eat grain-like seeds, like Amaranth, buckwheat, millet and quinoa, especially in the evening. These foods can boost your mood and combat your desire to over eat.
* Get plenty of exercise. Even walking around can boost your mood.
* Enjoy the sun when you can. Get outside on sunny mornings, even if it for a 15 minute walk, to reduce your body’s production of melatonin. You will sleep better at night.
* Reduce stress and relax. Watch and practice one of the [MINDFRESH TV](https://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/node/24054) videos available to HBC Associates.

If your symptoms are serious, you may be suffering from Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD), a type of depression that comes and goes with the seasons, typically starting in the late fall and early winter and going away during the spring and summer. If this is you, you should speak with your physician, or call HBC’s EAP to obtain counseling and, if necessary, treatment. Contact Optum at 866) 248-4094 or visit [WWW.LIVEANDWORKWELL.COM](WWW.LIVEANDWORKWELL.COM%20) and use access code **HBC**