



# CONQUER YOUR WINTER BLUES

by Sally Webster

To some, autumn and winter are aesthetically beautiful seasons, rich with opportunities to wrap up warm and kick about in crunchy golden leaves, frolic in the snow, stroll along the beach, then go home to tasty soups and hot drinks that warm the soul.

To others, the colder seasons represent a lack of sunshine, more time spent indoors away from much needed company, less physical activity and possibly a slow decline into feelings of isolation and mild depression.



The latter is commonly referred to as the *Winter Blues*, or in a few very severe cases, classified as a *Depressive Disorder with a Seasonal Pattern*. Until recently, *Seasonal Affective Disorder* was a commonly used title for the condition. It is widely considered to result from lack of light which affects mood through the body's over production of the sleep inducing hormone Melatonin, and under production of the 'feel good' hormone, Serotonin.

Most people's outlook sits somewhere between the positive, adaptive approach to winter, and the energy sapping *Winter Blues* - influenced either way of course by daily life, and the joys and rigours it presents.

To support and encourage people who want to find a happier way through winter in future, Lifespan is offering therapy designed specifically to identify and remedy the common mental health pitfalls of winter.



In individual or small group sessions, your therapist will listen to your thoughts and feelings on how your mood and lifestyle has fared in past winters.

They will then assist you to construct a positive path forward based on these elements:



- **Learn to embrace winter**, rather than shy away from it, battle through it, or fear how you might feel during the coldest months.

- **Build and maintain positive associations** with winter. What happy memories do you have of winter? What are some positive things open to you only in winter that you can take part in?

- **Plan a healthy diet** for eating and drinking that allows you to enjoy hearty seasonal and traditional fare without adverse effects on your physical or mental health.

- **Care for yourself** in a way that helps you feel safe, warm and self-valued. Treat yourself to something special. Even taking a little time to wrap up in a warm rug and enjoy a hot cup of tea is a nourishing act of self-care and consideration.



- **Build and/ or maintain social supports** so you stay socially active and feel relevant and involved in life. While loneliness is a normal human emotion in certain amounts, and should not be feared, extended social isolation can mean feelings of loneliness that contribute to ill health and depression.

- **Create an activity plan** that keeps you fit and gets plenty of energising oxygen to the brain. This is good not only for the body, but for the mind too.



- **Set up thought strategies** that turn seasonally negative thinking around and set you back on more positive thought pathways. Your therapist will help you access this strategy through a range of techniques, including setting aside quiet moments to focus on breathing and calm the mind.

If you're someone who is prone to developing the *Winter Blues* you'll know the potential effects your lack of energy and zest for life could have on your family, your partner, your work and your health. Ask one of our therapists about helping you embrace winter this year, and for many years to come.

