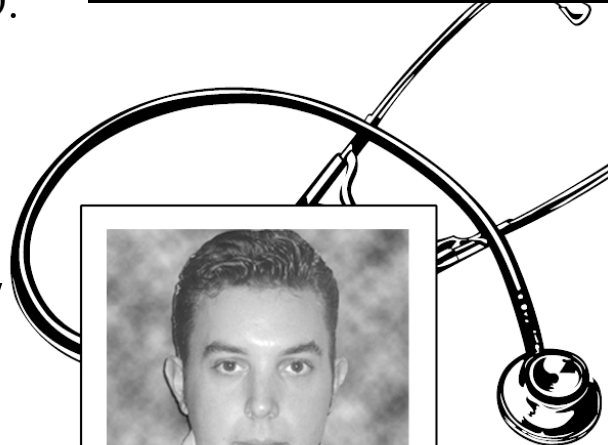


WITH DR. AIETA, N.D.

BEATING THE WINTER BLUES, NATURALLY



Dr. Frank Aieta, N.D.

With the winter months just around the corner and the days getting shorter, many patients are prone to a condition called seasonal affective disorder (SAD). This disorder is associated with winter depression and very happy moods during summer months. Typically, individuals with SAD feel depressed and generally slow down, oversleep, overeat, and crave carbohydrates in the winter. In the summer, these same patients feel elated, active and energetic.

There can be many variables responsible for SAD, but a lack of exposure to natural light is the most logical explanation. Without adequate exposure to sunlight there can be changes in hormones and neurotransmitters that control moods and our sense of well being. The hormone melatonin is secreted at night and is known as our bodies' sleep hormone. When there is a lack of sunshine, we tend to overproduce this hormone more during the day, while depleting an essential mood neurotransmitter called serotonin.

When melatonin levels are higher during the day and serotonin levels are low, this can lead to depression and mood changes consistent with SAD.

One of my primary treatments for this particular disorder is to have my patients purchase a full spectrum light and sit in front of it for a few hours each day. I recommend a 10,000 LUX light; many are available on the Internet in the form of desk lights and large light boxes. This

natural light will reduce the amount of melatonin released during the day and help raise serotonin levels.

I also have patients replace their standard light bulbs with full-spectrum light bulbs around their home. In addition to the full spectrum lighting, I have my patients take extra vitamin B-12 either sublingually or by injection. B-12 will enhance the effect of bright light in shutting off melatonin production during the day.

To increase serotonin levels, I often recommend patients take the amino acid 5-hydroxytryptophane along with the herb St. John's Wort. Both of these have been shown to help with SAD in controlled studies. The doses of each are determined on a patient-to-patient basis and are best if prescribed by a naturopathic physician.

Also, I encourage my patients to consume more protein during the winter months to help curb sugar and carbohydrate cravings.

Finally, I will check the patient's vitamin D level. In the September issue of the Western Mass. Sports Journal: The Magazine, I described the importance of maintaining proper vitamin D levels and health. Recent research shows that high doses of vitamin D-3 can significantly enhance mood in vitamin D-deficient patients with SAD, even better than the light therapy discussed above.

So, if you are suffering from the winter blues, invest in a full spectrum light, get your vitamin D levels checked, take some extra B-12 and

visit a naturopathic physician, who can prescribe a natural product to increase your serotonin levels.

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Reminder:

Dr. Frank Aieta is a board certified and licensed naturopathic physician with a private practice in West Hartford, Conn. He specializes in the treatment of disease, using natural therapies such as acupuncture, homeopathy, spinal manipulation, clinical nutrition, and herbal medicine. If there is a specific topic you would like to see addressed in an upcoming column, you can e-mail him at

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“The Western Mass Sports Journal has maximized our exposure to athletes and the general sports community, a demographic which represents a large portion of our business. Since coming on board with the first issue, I continue to be impressed each month with the quality and professionalism of this first rate sports publication.”

Jim Vernadakis
Nova Care Clinical Operations Director