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Q&A

[BY MATT BRZYCKI]

What is seasonal affective disorder?

Seasonal affective disorder (SAD) is a condition that's characterized by recurrent episodes of depression in a seasonal pattern. Other classic symptoms include fatigue, longer duration of sleep and weight gain. To be diagnosed with SAD, the symptoms must occur in the fall and winter, and subside in the spring and summer.

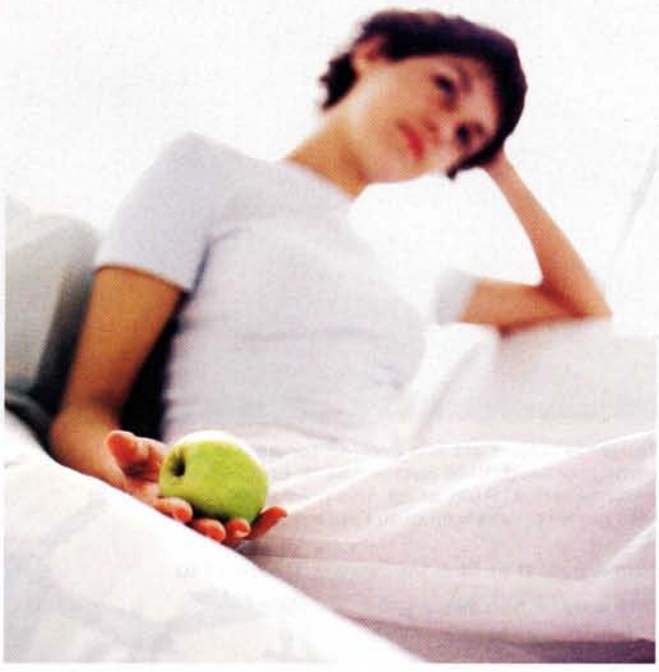
It's estimated that the incidence of SAD is as high as 10 percent of the population (with a higher incidence in women). The incidence increases in populations that reside farther from the equator where there are more seasonal changes. One study showed a greater incidence of SAD in the higher latitudes of New Hampshire, New York and Maryland, compared to the lower latitude of Florida.

The exact cause of SAD is unclear, but seems to be strongly related to the weather and the length of time an individual spends outside. It's thought that personality and heredity play a major role in SAD, as well.

Regardless of the cause, one practical and inexpensive solution is exercise, since it has been found to improve mood and decrease stress. In particular, exercising outdoors is an important tactic for combating SAD. **FM**

Is the appetite suppressed after a workout?

It seems logical to think that, after a workout, appetite would be stimulated. However, after a workout — at least an intense workout — appetite is suppressed. This phenomenon has been dubbed "exercise-induced anorexia."



Some researchers feel that the type of exercise plays a role in the degree of appetite suppression. Consider stationary cycling, a non-weightbearing activity in which the position of the body is fairly stable. Contrast this to running, a weightbearing activity in which the position of the body is highly variable. It's thought that maintaining a stable position while exercising may minimize physiological distress and result in less suppression of appetite.

Here's an interesting point: Although appetite is suppressed following exercise, it doesn't influence the daily intake of calories. Research has found that people tend to consume the same amount of calories on the days that they exercise as they do on the days that they don't exercise.

It's also been thought that, after exercise, there's a craving for a particular nutrient, such as carbohydrates. However, this doesn't appear to have any support in scientific literature. **FM**

Is chocolate milk an effective recovery fluid?

One of the latest substances to be touted as a recovery fluid is chocolate milk. It's believed that the combination of amino acids and carbohydrates in milk helps to stimulate the synthesis of muscle protein.

In one study, nine endurance-trained cyclists drank iso-volumic amounts (509.1 milliliters) of low-fat chocolate milk (382 calories), a fluid replacement drink (106 calories) or a carbohydrate replacement drink (382 calories). There were no significant differences between the chocolate milk and the fluid replacement drink at improving time to exhaustion and total work on a stationary cycle. In another study, 19 untrained subjects drank iso-caloric amounts (5 calories per kilogram of bodyweight) of low-fat chocolate milk or a carbohydrate/electrolyte drink immediately following a strength-training workout that consisted of seven exercises. After 10 weeks, there were no significant differences between the two beverages in terms of body composition or muscular strength.

If milk is employed as a recovery fluid, understand that it has several drawbacks. For one thing, milk may provide more calories than desired. Needless to say, this is a major concern if weight loss is a goal. Milk can also cause gastrointestinal upset, especially in those who are lactose intolerant. And, unlike most other beverages, milk must remain refrigerated until it's used. **FM**

Matt Brzycki is coordinator of recreational fitness and wellness programs at Princeton University, Princeton, N.J. He has more than 22 years of experience at the collegiate level and has authored, co-authored or edited 14 books.