

M (7" x 10 1/2)

OVERSET:

"When light becomes scarce, some mammals as well as people go into a form of hibernation," said Bell. Many people gain between 9 and 30 pounds during the winter.

And a bunch more.

5 THINGS

YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT

○ The winter blues

1. It's not your imagination. Shorter, darker days can cause winter depression — or seasonal affective disorder (SAD), and that "season" runs roughly from November through early spring in North America. Symptoms include fatigue, weight gain (as much as 30 pounds!) and a weakened immune system. About 10 million Americans are significantly affected.

2. Know the causes. Lack of light during waking hours is the root. "Your body's rhythm and rate of endorphin production are interrupted," says Dr. Carl Bell, president of the Community Mental Health Council. The added stress of upcoming holidays plus inclement weather can snowball. "Try not to take on major projects when you know you aren't your best self," says Dr. Norman Rosenthal, author of *Winter Blues*.

Seasonal affective disorder seems to hit women the hardest.

3. Demographics matter. SAD is more likely to hit women (75% of sufferers) and those age 18 to 40. People who live in areas with drastic climate change have increased vulnerability. And it's genetic. "Part of the problem is that it's both nature and nurture," Bell says.

4. Help yourself. Phototherapy — the use of light boxes and dawn simulators — is effective in up to 85% of diagnosed cases. "Sometimes natural light just doesn't cut it," Rosenthal says. Patients can eat, work and read while they sit under rays that are up to 20 times stronger than a light bulb.

5. Get outdoors. A Swiss study found that in milder SAD cases, an hour-long walk in winter sunlight could be as effective as spending 2.5 hours under bright indoor lights. **W**

— Ladan Nekoomaram