

Are You Getting Enough Light This Winter?

Doctors Say Less Exposure To Sunlight Could Affect Your Productivity

NEW YORK (CBS), January 14, 2008 — Rain, gloom, days that just feel much shorter.



Reporting
Dr. Max Gomez

It's just part of winter in the northeast and it may be making it harder for you to get up on gloomy mornings like today. Or maybe you're up and still have no energy, or you're simply feeling blue.

And it certainly doesn't help that it's often dark in the morning when we head to work, and once again dark when we leave. Worse yet, an urban lifestyle means even more time indoors or on subways.

Bottom line: it all adds up to much less exposure to sunlight, and for many people, that can put a damper on the day.

"My mood, my energy, my ability to work, to communicate with people, to be social [are affected]," says Anselm Skogstad, a creative director in New York. "The concentration was just going downhill, absolutely downhill. The days were half as productive as I originally used to work."

Just as distressing for a creative director like Skogstad was a dry spell of fresh ideas. It's a problem that may affect millions during the winter, ranging from the "blahs" and the blues to full-blown depression.

"This is something that will last and not show an upswing until the middle of March, and won't be completely gone until May," says Dr. Michael Terman of the New York State Psychiatric Institute.

The problem is a lack of sunshine and seems that something called the "pineal gland" deep in our brains is the body's master-clock. But it needs sunlight to synchronize our sleep-wake cycle, which in turn is linked to our general well-being. The light we get in the winter just isn't enough.

"The level of light we're getting in our offices, if you took a light meter, would measure sometime in the middle of twilight. It isn't a full daylight level. A lot of us are never seeing full daylight intensities," says Terman.

The solution seems almost too simple: get more light.

Skogstad uses a light box while he checks his e-mail in the morning. And while it is simple, the intensity of the light is key, as is the duration and especially the time of day you get that light exposure.

"Especially if you use the lights too early in the morning, it can have a counter-therapeutic effect. So you need to anchor light exposure to your individual circadian rhythm," says Terman.

Skogstad noticed a difference within just a week of regular light therapy. "Much more happier, and more successful simply as a happy, working human being," he says.

Again, even though it looks simple, when and how long you use the light makes a big difference. The best time depends on whether you're a lark or an owl -- a morning or night person -- or what doctors call your circadian rhythm.

To figure that out, Terman has developed a simple questionnaire you can take.

LINK:

Light Therapy
CBS 2 News This Morning

Light therapy involves exposure to intense levels of light under controlled conditions.
[Center For Environmental Therapeutics <www.cet.org>](http://www.cet.org)



Less exposure to sunlight could be making you less effective on the job.