

Winter blues and seasonal affective disorder

While the holiday season can bring about some unwanted stress, there are some scientific reasons why your mood can be affected by the seasons.

With the dark nights of winter and the colder days upon us, many people start to feel more lethargic, less motivated and experience lower moods than usual. 1 in 3 people, in the UK alone, suffer these general symptoms, with some describing a need for more sleep, while others experience less enjoyment in hobbies and activities.

While many people experience low moods during the winter months, 1 in 20 suffer from a more severe form known as Seasonal Affective Disorder

(or more aptly 'SAD'), which can have a significant impact on a person's daily life, impeding their ability to work or to socialise.

A crew member's ability to perform in their role is crucial for not only the safe transportation of goods, but also to stay safe and prevent injury to themselves and others. Seafarers can be affected by SAD just like the rest of us, and together with the daily stresses of the job, it can be easy for crew to feel overwhelmed, both mentally and physically.

What causes Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD)?

The conditions of the winter season, such as shorter days, colder temperatures and lack of natural sunlight, can have an impact on a person's energy levels and overall mental and physical health, with the distinct lack of sunlight being a crucial factor.

Natural sunlight is an important element in any healthy lifestyle, being an invaluable source of vitamin D, as



well as affecting a person's serotonin levels and internal body clock.

Vitamin D

The human body uses sunlight to generate vitamin D, which is crucial for absorbing calcium and maintaining healthy bones, teeth and muscles.

Serotonin

The hormone that affects mood, decision making, social behavior and other cognitive functions.

Internal body clock

A person's exposure to sunlight can affect their internal body clock, resulting in fatigue.

What to look out for

- Greater need for sleep
- Agitation or anxiety
- A loss of pleasure or interest in normal everyday activities
- Persistent low mood
- Less energy / fatigue
- Trouble concentrating
- Increased appetite / weight gain
- Becoming less sociable

Minimising the effects of SAD

There are many changes that can be made to mitigate the effects of SAD during winter, these include:

- Try to get as much sunlight as possible during the day. If this is not possible, a 'light box' that emits light similar to that of the sun can be beneficial.
- Include more vitamin D in your diet by eating vitamin rich foods, such as fish, oranges and eggs.
- Try to exercise for 30 minutes a day.
- Where possible, try to avoid stressful situations, and take steps to manage your stress levels.

Additional resources on physical and mental health for seafarers

The Crew Health team are in regular contact with industry experts throughout the year, sourcing the latest advice. For seafarers' and Members' interest, the team create Crew Health advice bulletins on how to stay safe and



healthy. All the bulletins can be found on the Club's website.

Further support on mental health is widely available from our charity partners in the maritime sector, who work closely with seafarers.

The Sailors' Society Wellness at Sea Programme and App

Seafarers are advised to keep up-to-date on health initiatives and to monitor their own physical and mental health. Health, exercise and diet monitoring apps are proving very popular amongst the workforce. Apps such as The Sailors' Society Wellness at Sea App work in conjunction with their enhanced training programme to actively promote positive crew wellbeing. The app provides interactive challenges on each of the five elements of Wellness at Sea training: Social, Emotional, Physical, Intellectual and Spiritual wellness. App users receive daily feedback, which enables them to monitor their progress (Android and iPhone compatible). For more information, please visit www.sailors-society.org/wellness.

The UK P&I Club Crew Health team charity partners can also advise on how crew can maintain their physical and mental health while at sea, as well as what they can do if they feel overwhelmed.

ISWAN's SeafarerHelp

SeafarerHelp is the free, multi-lingual helpline for seafarers and their families, available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year.

To contact SeafarerHelp:

SMS: +44 (0)762 481 8405

Skype: info-seafarerhelp.org

Live chat: www.seafarerhelp.org

Email: help@seafarerhelp.org

Call collect: +44 (0)207 323 2737

The Club Crew Health team continues to meet with **Mission to Seafarers** and **Apostleship of the Seas** on a regular basis to share confidential, anonymous information on activities, and to highlight needs that have been flagged-up during the charities' discussions with seafarers. Both these charities offer the support of port chaplains, to whom seafarers can speak in the utmost confidence.

To contact a Mission to Seafarers chaplain, please visit:
www.missiontoseafarers.org

Apostleship of the Seas port chaplains may be contacted via their website:
www.apostleshipofthesea.org.uk

Additionally, the Club team also collaborated with **Human Rights at Sea** to sponsor the publication of 'Remaining Resilient after Traumatic Events'. This key booklet offering practical advice on handling difficult situations is available in English and Tagalog in the publications section of the Club website as a post-incident guide for all seafarers.

This document is for information purposes only and does not constitute or replace medical advice.

CREW HEALTH PROGRAMME

The Club was the first to launch a crew health scheme in 1996 due to increasing crew illness claims and a lack of accountability of clinics. Since 1996, the Crew Health programme has become one of the Club's leading loss prevention initiatives. The aim of the programme is to reduce the volume and value of crew illness claims which are caused by a pre-existing illnesses or disease. These underlying conditions often impact on the crew member's fitness for service and can endanger not only the health of the seafarer but also the onboard safety of other crew.

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Sophia joined Thomas Miller in 1992 and from 1994 worked as a claims handler dealing mainly with French and Spanish Members. In 2004, Sophia became the Crew Health Programme Director. Sophia has undertaken a large number of clinic audits, implemented the standard medical form and clinic guidelines. She has also lead the scheme through the largest period of growth and development with a doubling of approved clinic facilities and a four fold member increase. Sophia is a Director of Thomas Miller & Co. Ltd.

Saidul Alom

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Saidul Alom joined Crew Health from the European Region Service Team in 2004. Saidul provides administrative support to the Crew Health programme and is responsible for liaison with the approved clinics on financial billing matters and ensuring prompt payment of all clinic fees

Stuart Last

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Stuart joined Thomas Miller in 1998 as a claims trainee for UK P&I Club's Greek Members. In April 2005 Stuart joined Crew Health as the Team Administrator. Stuart is responsible for co-ordination of Member entries and administration for the clinic approval process.