

# Brighten up your life

**JOHN R. COOK, PH.D.**

Registered Psychologist

Do you feel down in the dumps, have less energy and put on a few pounds during the dark, shorter days of winter? You may be suffering from the "winter blues" or a more severe form of the winter blues called Seasonal Affective Disorder or SAD. One in five of us suffers from this problem. Symptoms can include an increase in sleep of up to four hours a day, a serious case of the munchies, and a desire to withdraw, almost like a bear entering hibernation for the winter.

In 60 to 80 percent of cases, the cure for this potentially disabling condition is daily exposure to high-intensity, fluorescent, photo-therapy lamp or SAD light. These lamps are up to 20 times brighter than what you would find in the average home or office, and come in various shapes and sizes.

The lamps are used by sitting in front of and slightly below them with eyes averted downward. Simply position your eyes within 18 to 24 inches of the fluorescent tube, and carry on eating, reading, or writing as you normally would.

Treatment for most people should begin in the fall and continue through till April when the outdoor light is sufficient to provide for their needs. An early start on photo-therapy in the fall can reduce or even prevent symptoms of winter SAD. Exposure periods

range from 20 to 45 minutes a day, preferably in the early morning. Besides its beneficial properties in treating seasonal depressions, bright light can also be helpful with seasonal overeating and weight gain that occur without depressed mood. Some non-seasonal depressions, sleep problems, and effects of jet-lag can also be treated with light therapy. Although side effects are rare, they can include headaches, eye strain, irritability or anxiety, and restlessness.

Before diagnosing yourself with SAD, and running out to buy a SAD light, see your family physician. He or she can tell you if there are any contraindications to using the lights, such as eye disease or taking light-sensitive medication. Your physician can also help diagnose medical disorders that masquerade as SAD. These include underactive thyroid function, low blood sugar, and chronic viral infections.

Next, consider renting a lamp to find out if the treatment is effective. One can usually tell within the first two weeks. Reputable distributors of SAD lamps, such as Aegis, will allow you to apply your rental cost toward the purchase price if you decide to keep the unit.

*Dr. Cook is a registered clinical psychologist and founder of Aegis Psychological Services Inc.. His speciality is helping people with stress and anxiety-related conditions, including job-related and post-traumatic stress.*



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# No more pain: The psychological treatment of chronic pain

**GARY E. BRANDSTADT**  
M.S.W., RSW, (CSCH)

A great deal can be done about managing and reducing physical pain, if one just puts one's mind to it. More than anything else, dealing with chronic pain requires constant practice in balancing different life-skills such as: assertiveness vs. "just letting be"; physical or mental activity vs. total passivity (meditation); and, serious purpose vs. letting go and playfulness. People who are physically healthy don't necessarily have to worry about this balance. They can stay up late to watch a movie, and still function the next day. They can work 10-hour days, day after day, without serious problems. They can make love in all different kinds of positions, and still get out of bed the next day.

## The research says some surprising things about the factors that influence our experience of pain.

\* High life-stressors (e.g., lack of money and lack of social support) and poor mental attitude (e.g., depression) are more closely associated with our experience of pain than the extent of our disability.

\* People with high self-esteem and good problem-solving skills experience much less pain.

\* People with a high sense of purpose focusing them outward on things like grandchildren, writing, or a career, experience considerably less pain, even under high stress. The person who doesn't have a sense of purpose will focus instead on the uncomfortable feelings in their body-and then may get caught in a vicious circle of anxiety, fear, anger, and depression.

## It may be helpful for the chronic pain sufferer to look at the following questions.

1. How would I rate my self-esteem? Do I need better problem-solving and life-skills such as assertiveness or relaxation?
2. Am I frequently upset about something, that I feel no control over? Do I have a sense of powerlessness - that I can't do what I used to do, or live the kind of life I used to live. If so, this may need to be talked over with a psychotherapist. Pain medication can also sometimes contribute to a sense of powerlessness if it makes you feel woozy or "spaced-out".
3. How is my social/emotional support? Do I have several people I can talk to, about my issues, including pain?
4. Do I have a strong sense of purpose? Is it in my control? Does it make me feel good? Can I develop one?



Other essential tools in dealing with chronic pain are relaxation and grief management skills. Relaxation triggers the release of endorphins into the blood-stream, and maintain levels of serotonin in the body which counteract the tendency toward depression. Grief is another component of pain. There can be a grief-or-anger reaction each time one "hits a wall" or feels limited in what one wants to do. It can be an a daily or weekly occurrence, that must be "flushed out of the system" or the pain can be intolerable, disabling.

Ultimately, if one operates with the balance between a sense of peaceful purpose at the mental/ emotional/ spiritual level, and a sense of purposeful activity at the physical level, one may have surprisingly little physical pain.

*Gary Brandstadt is an affiliate of Aegis with a specialization in chronic pain, and the associated debility; depression, and anxiety disorders. He is author of the book CHRONIC PAIN MANAGEMENT: 18 Lessons in Living and the audio-tape Relaxation for Pain. He runs a Pain Management Program at Aegis each year.*

## Is Anxiety Stressing you Out?

Take a test that may change your life

National Anxiety Disorders Screening Day is offering free screenings for anxiety and depressive disorders. Participants will view a video, take an anxiety disorders screening test and have a confidential meeting with a mental-health professional.

Free educational materials will also be available.

1st Wednesday in May 205-4400 Chatterton Way



## Relaxation Skills

Deep abdominal breathing  
Stretches  
Focusing  
Self-hypnosis (distancing)  
Visualization  
Affirmations  
Thought-stopping  
Laughter  
Music/dance  
Painting



# Is Depression Getting you Down?

National Depression Screening Day takes place every year during Mental Illness Awareness Week. It is designed to call attention to the illnesses of depression and manic-

depression. Participants learn about symptoms and effective treatments, have an opportunity to be screened for these disorders, and if needed, are connected with the mental health care system.

**2nd Thursday in October  
205-4400 Chatterton Way**

## Handling conflict with your partner

**BRENDA LUCAS, M.A.**  
Registered Clinical Counsellor

Long-term, intimate relationships are difficult to sustain. Conflict arises, and we inevitably start to feel dissatisfied with each other. How do you and your partner handle grievances in your relationship?

The following are some suggestions you may wish to consider, both on your own and in counselling.

### On Your Own

When you have something to talk about, it is a good idea to make appointments with your partner for discussions, especially about grievances. Choose a mutually agreed upon time and place. Some people tend to avoid conflict, and wait indefinitely for the perfect time, place or mood. Don't let this happen to you! You may have to actually sit down and discuss things with your partner even if conditions are not exactly right.

You need to acknowledge your feelings to your partner. For example, we often store up anger. Having anger does not mean you have to act on it; however, it helps to allow yourself to feel it. Some individuals fear that admitting to anger will lead to separation or divorce. Actually, the opposite is true. Long term repression of anger can lead to crisis.

As you start the discussion with your partner, pay attention to your body language. You can look right at your partner and say "I am angry." in a firm calm voice. Do not look at the wall or floor. Some people smile or laugh while discussing hurts or angers. This undercuts the seriousness of their communication. Do not do this. Do remember that you are an adult with the right to express your feelings and views, and to have them heard as real concerns.

You can communicate your feelings (anger, hurt, betrayal) without assaulting your partner's personality through the use of "I" messages. "I" messages are statements about how you feel that begins with "I", and suggest a remedy. For example, "I feel angry when I see clothes all over the place. Perhaps we could each pick up our own parts of the mess." Statements like these can really de-escalate hurts.

If you do begin to blame or name call, you can control your impulses by taking time out for yourself. For example, go to the bathroom, put water on your face, breathe, count, and remind yourself that you have the right to express your feelings with respect. Postpone the discussion for later, but do make another appointment and try again.

Never tolerate violence initiated by you or your partner! If violence develops, get help! Violence is never acceptable!

### In Counselling

Couples counselling is a useful means of airing grievances, to find areas of agreement, and to identify what is working in your relationship. Individual counselling is necessary if there has been any violence (past or current). Couples counselling can be a possible

future goal once the goals of individual counselling have been achieved. Choose your counsellor carefully. Interview potential therapists. Find one that you trust. Non-sexist therapists believe that each person is an expert on his or her own life. Ask about their areas of expertise, experience, and education. Discuss with them their ethics about confidentiality. Use counselling as an opportunity to build competencies, rather than to identify inadequacies in the other partner. In order to build on the strengths and goodness of each partner, it is important that each partner gets to discuss the things that are bothering him/her. Do this by recognizing inner conflict, accepting the full range of feelings, and increasing tolerance for the difficult feelings of grief, anxiety, hate, jealousy, or rage.

Wherever you seek counselling, be sure that the counsellor helps both partners. No one party, male or female should be allowed to dominate the session. The counsellor needs to remain neutral and not take sides. If one partner is not getting to express their concerns or one is dominating, tell the therapist and insist on equal time.

*Brenda Lucas is an Aegis associate who works in the area of couples counselling, childhood abuse, trauma and anxiety. As do all Aegis associates, she offers 20-minute, complimentary interviews for you to get to know her.*

## Conflict Resolution

Here are some ideas for handling grievances:

### ON YOUR OWN

- Make appointments to talk
- Acknowledge your feelings
- Pay attention to body language
- Make use of "I" messages
- Take time out for yourself
- Never tolerate violence!

### IN COUNSELLING

- Choose carefully
- Build competencies
- Insist on equal time



# Helping children express grief\*

**NICOLE A. NUMAN, M.A.**

Registered Clinical Counselor

"Where did Grandma go? Pet Rover? Why doesn't daddy live here anymore?" Children work through issues and feelings in different ways than adults do; their developmental stage, both intellectually and emotionally, may affect how they react. Nonetheless, children must work through the same stages of grief and loss as adults - namely, acknowledging their loss, expressing their feelings and emotions, and adjusting to their loss. Covering up an issue doesn't do a child a favour. Indeed, children may not be ready to talk but they need to know that there is someone who will listen if they want to.

## How do we, as adults, help children through the tasks of grief and loss?

### \* Acknowledge the loss

Talk about the loss. Note the child's need for repetition and for revisiting the grief. Use honest, concrete language. Do not use euphemisms (e.g. "Death is a long sleep") as this may lead to misconceptions.

### \* Acknowledge feelings and emotions

Help children identify their emotions through art, music, or play. Attach words to the emotions they display so they in turn will make associations themselves. Read stories or use photos to help them in their verbalizations.

### \* Adjust to the loss

Reassure the child that new relationships or pets don't replace the grieved or missed person or pet but may serve in a similar role. Children's drawings and written stories are often an easy opportunity to discuss ideas and feelings.

As children develop they must interpret their losses in the light of their new understanding and abilities. Allow children to revisit their grief. Indeed all children experience loss and may need help in learning ways to deal with them.

*Nicole Numan is an Aegis associate who works in the area of parent/child education and support, sibling relations, women's issues, and addictions.*

\* For resources related to this article please contact Nicole.



# Help in dealing with life crises and transitions

**SUSAN GERARD, M.A.**

Registered Clinical Counselor

As part of living, we all deal with life transitions or passages. These events can trigger an abundance of powerful emotions and questions, including questions about oneself and the meaning of life. Moving into middle age, the "empty nest" syndrome, changing careers, or a

move to a new city can be accompanied by feelings of depression, anxiety, and loss. Crises, as well, are a very challenging aspect of life. Whenever life crises or tragedies occur, we may feel a loss of control, and question why these things have happened to us. Divorce, serious illness, or the death of a loved one can cause one to feel overwhelmed and question the purpose of life. Exploring spiritual beliefs and questions can be incorporated into counseling. Doing so can be especially helpful when dealing with a life crisis, transition or in coping with everyday problems and stress. As a Counsellor, I attempt to utilize and incorporate the client's spiritual beliefs system into the counseling process to facilitate growth and healing. These life crises

and passages can be dealt with effectively in counseling when the client has the opportunity to explore spiritual beliefs and concerns in a safe, supportive environment. Coupled with this exploration, the use of meditation, guided imagery, and visualization can often help the client gain a clear perspective on issues he or she is dealing with, while increasing their sense of clarity, peace, and purpose. These gains are often accompanied by feeling more in control over one's life.

*Susan Gerard is an Aegis associate who specializes in work with depression and self-esteem, life crises and transitions, women's issues, and spiritual issues.*



## Our Services

**COUNSELLING**  
INDIVIDUAL  
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EFFECTIVE  
COMMUNICATION

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SAD LIGHTS  
RELAXATION TAPES  
MOTIVATIONAL AIDS

**Aegis**  
Psychological Services

**250-881-1206**

Fax: 250-881-1207

email: [aegis@psycserv.com](mailto:aegis@psycserv.com)

web: [www.psycserv.com](http://www.psycserv.com)

205-4400 Chatterton Way

Victoria, BC Canada V8X 5J2