



WINTER EDITION June-July-August 2014

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This newsletter was put together by the staff of the Otago Mental Health Support Trust.

Editor: Grant Cooper

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OTAGO MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT TRUST

- Peer Support
- Bipolar Network
- Information, Education
- Advocacy, Consumer Networking
- Resource centre for Tangata Whaiora

Staff available

Monday -Friday.

Our office is open 10-3pm daily
(unless all staff out on business)

3rd Floor,

Queens Building,

109 Princes Street,

DUNEDIN.

Ph: (03) 477-2598

0800364462

Fax: (03) 477-6749

e-mail: otagomd@ihug.co.nz

www.bipolarotago.co.nz

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The opinions and articles expressed in this newsletter do not necessarily represent the views of the Otago Mental Health Support Trust or anyone associated with the organisation

Tired, hungry and sad? Relax, you're hibernating –

From daily mail online.www.dailymail.co.uk by *Catherine Zandonella*

Does dull weather wear you down? Does every shop crammed with sales stock send your spirits plummeting? Is that health kick abandoned in favour of comfort food and a relationship with your duvet? Don't worry - perhaps your body's trying to hibernate.

Some people get the winter blues on a monumental scale. Sufferers of seasonal affective disorder (SAD) would rather cosy up to a television set than another human being. They shun sex in favour of pizza, snooze for maybe 16 hours a day and are often moody.

Small wonder that SAD sufferers compare their condition to hibernation.

When hibernating animals prepare for winter, their metabolism slows down, their sex drive wanes and they sleep in dens, surviving till spring on fat reserves.

The theory that seasonal depression is an atavistic form of hibernation was once dismissed by researchers. But recent studies have reawakened interest in the theory.

It's true there are major differences between seasonal blues and other forms of depression. Clinically depressed people usually lose interest in food, finding it tasteless or even unpleasant. They often shed weight and have great trouble sleeping. Sufferers of seasonal depression are just the opposite, eating and sleeping with gusto.

While SAD affects just a few per cent of the population, many researchers believe that most of us are susceptible to seasonal overeating, oversleeping and a general bodily go-slow. Some even say it's the extreme end of a spectrum of adaptive responses to winter weather.

'We want to establish whether SAD is part of our genetic background,' says George Wilson of the University of Tasmania in Hobart. 'It could be a programmed reaction to shorter daylight hours in winter.'

Recent studies have uncovered hibernation like physiology in people with SAD.

Margaret Austen - one of Wilson's colleagues in Hobart, where winter nights average 15 hours long - looked at SAD-related changes in the autonomic nervous system. These nerves regulate functions such as breathing and heart rate and are involved in hibernation. They could be just as prominent in seasonal depression, too.

There are two parts to the autonomic nervous system which work in opposition to control bodily functions. The 'sympathetic' system boosts metabolism, while the 'parasympathetic' system damps down bodily functions.

Just before animals hibernate, they experience a spike in the activity of their parasympathetic nervous system, which slows their heart rate and decreases their body temperature and metabolic rate. Austen found a similar parasympathetic response in people with SAD.

'Animals prepare for winter by fattening up and then sleeping though it,' says Austen. 'In humans that is not practical. So, instead, we eat more and gain weight through the winter, and we lack energy and sleep more.' A similar study in Russia found that hibernation-like activity in SAD patients (binge eating and excessive sleeping) are signs of an adaptive mechanism aimed at conservation of energy.

Continued

A fizzling winter sex drive is an adaptation to the winter chill, too, says Thomas Wehr of the National Institute of Mental Health near Washington DC.

Evidence shows that human responses to seasonal changes may have been more pronounced before electric lighting was common. Low sex drive in winter could have served both to conserve energy through the winter and ensure that your offspring are born at a time when food is available.

Babies conceived in winter would be born in autumn, when food is starting to become scarce. Babies conceived in summer would be born in spring, when food is starting to be plentiful.

Matthew Andrews, from the University of Minnesota at Duluth, discovered that a number of genes used by animals to kick-start hibernation in the way they convert fat reserves are also found in humans.

So is SAD an evolutionary leftover? Andrews says that the existence of similar genes alone is no proof that humans once hibernated. Still, he adds: 'If there were any vestige of hibernation in humans, it makes sense that it would be something like SAD.'

Day length is always a key factor in hibernating animals. The shortening period of light tells the body's internal clock that winter is approaching.

Shorter days also trigger SAD. Treatment usually includes daily sessions in front of a strong light source. This phototherapy works by tricking the circadian pacemaker in the brain, improving mood and reducing lethargy.

Wehr believes that all humans have the potential to succumb to seasonal alterations, but that most of us can ignore changes in day length because we live in a world of artificial lights.

'I suspect what we call winter depression has its origins in evolutionary biology,' he says.

'The symptoms might well have been normal behaviour, but now we view them as extreme.'

Despite the many biological similarities between hibernation and 'seasonality' in humans, many researchers are far from convinced. Hibernating squirrels can drop their body temperatures to just above freezing for weeks at a time. Even bears, much closer to us in size, are capable of surviving up to five months on their own body fat, neither of which we could do.

But lots of non-hibernating animals make it through winter in a torpid state, reducing their body temperatures and whittling their metabolisms down to a minimum.

Madagascar lemurs retire to a tree hole during the winter, where they sit like zombies for days on end. It's lack of food, rather than cold, that drives them to hibernate.

Since humans evolved in the equatorial climes of Africa, perhaps our hunter-gatherer ancestors may have evolved a similar ability to survive long periods without food.

Nowadays, we just have to survive long nights. Luckily, we can crawl under the covers, get the candles lit and the fire roaring and hit the remote control. Don't feel guilty. After all, you are just doing what comes naturally.

Mental Illness in the Media



Media representation of mental illness is not often one that shines a light on people's successes in their lives. But a story featured in the New Zealand Herald, in January this year, highlights a reunion of two strangers that were involved in a life changing moment.

In 2008, Jonny Benjamin tried to jump from the London's Waterloo Bridge, but was stopped by a stranger passing by. At the time of this encounter Jonny was struggling to cope with his schizoaffective disorder.

Six years later Jonny was in search of this man who saved his life, and started a campaign called 'Find Mike' (as he couldn't remember the man's name in his distressed state). This campaign was supported by charity Rethink Mental Illness, and soon #FindMike was featuring worldwide on social media – such as Facebook and Twitter.

It was Neil Laybourn's fiancé that directed him to Jonny's campaign, and this is when Neil knew that he was 'Mike', the passer-by Jonny was looking for.

Speaking of the incident Neil says:

"I didn't feel it was that big a deal, I just did what anyone would do. I wasn't trying to fix his problems that day, I just listened."

Jonny, now a mental health campaigner was delighted to be able to say "thank you, it's as though I've come full circle and that chapter of my life has now closed".

"It really shows how the simple act of listening can be a huge support to someone struggling with their mental health" Jonny says.

Rethink Mental Illness' CEO Paul Jenkins said that not only did the #FindMike campaign help reunite these two connected strangers, but it also helped to open up conversations about mental health. **"We don't talk about these issues enough, but the more we do, the more we break down the stigma that surrounds them"**

(The New Zealand Herald, 31 January)

Men Wanted for Hazardous Journey written by Rob Cope

Kiwi man culture is full of mate-talk quotes *"She'll be right"* *"pull ya head in"* *"that's a bit rough mate."* Forty year old, Wellington raised, Rob Cope is a modern-day crusader who both enlightens and challenges us all with his profound message: **"Our model of manhood is broken. Let's fix it."** Hence his book, 'Men Wanted for Hazardous Journey' reads very much like an interactive conversation that fully engages you, the reader. It is as if you are personally there sitting with Rob (the Author) around his homebuilt and specially designed conversation pit, amidst a crackling fire. Rob openly and honestly reveals how he has hit rock bottom twice throughout his life, and how men generally need to stop hiding behind masks that isolate men, not only each other, but also from their loved ones as well, because as a man you are just meant to carry on through life as a functional 'human doing' rather than as an innate 'Human Being.'

This inspirational 127 page easy read book is divided into three jam packed sections that also includes information about his own personal 'Project Wildman' retreat centre, along with a short 18 page 'Project Wildman: The Manual' (if you wish to set up your own 'Council of Men Tribe'). The book's primary target audience is for men, yet it is also very useful reading for their loved ones who wish to understand the struggles, the isolation, the anger, the depression, and the sheer damn frustration of what it is to be a man.

As this book is self-published it is not available in bookshops, but can easily be ordered online from www.projectwildman.co.nz for \$17.00 with free postage within New Zealand. Highly recommended read: 4.7 out of 5 star rating. Book Review by P.J.

THE 59TH STREET BRIDGE SONG (FEELIN' GROOVY)

Slow down, you move too fast
You got to make the morning last
Just kicking down the cobblestones
Looking for fun and feelin' groovy

The ART of Slow...

Winter is upon us and nature is showing us that winding down and going slower is a process necessary to prepare us for the spring burst and ,sustainable long summer days, gradually winding down to an autumnal stretch and yawn before the quiet embrace of winter.

In our climate the distinction of seasons can often be blurred and things do seem to keep on growing albeit at a slower pace.

For some the darkness, shorter days can be bring on SAD (ness).

Winter conjures up ideas of "comfort food", hot water bottles, warm fires and generally enjoying the opportunity not having to make the most out of daylight hours. It affirms that it OK to do nothing, be a little lazy

It's when the nothing becomes a compulsion that it can be problematic. So to prevent that from being your SAD reality make a plan.

Exercise: As much as you may not feel like it, go for a short walk, rain or shine, this will give you a feel good factor for the rest of the day.

Food glorious food: When you're down the first thing to go is your appetite, a way around this is to plan your weekly menu, (or menus).

Resources are limited; stews and soups are good standard nourishing standbys.

Entertainment: What's on? Check out your local newspaper for events that are on that are affordable or Free. Aim to do something once a month. Print out a monthly calendar and mark it with events that are coming up.

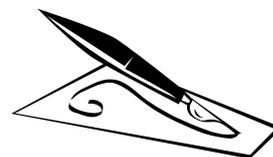
Relax, its winter and it will pass; see winter in a positive light. Keep a mental list of special people who can support you, often surprisingly support is often more mutual than you think.

OMHST has a new edition of Recreation in Dunedin –Free and under \$5. Ring if you would like a copy, or call in.



Incite is a group of interested people who use or have used mental health services. We discuss and take action on issues of interest to consumers.

We meet monthly in Dunedin. For more information phone 4772598 and ask about Incite.



What is a gratitude journal?

Well, it can be anything really. Like a leather-bound notebook, a memo pad, or even a few sheets of loose-leaf paper.

What you write in isn't important. What matters is that at least once a week (although it's better to do it every day) you spend a few minutes writing down 3 to 5 things you are grateful for.

It sounds simple enough, but why would anyone bother doing it?

What's the point?

Believe it or not, this simple, five minute exercise can help make you both happier and healthier.

Here are just a few of the benefits of keeping a gratitude journal.

Feel Better Mentally

People who keep gratitude journals report feeling happier and more content. In fact, they feel more satisfied with their lives in general than they did before they started keeping a gratitude journal.

Have you noticed how people who focus on the positive things in life tend to be happier and more upbeat? They also tend to be more confident, whether they are being interviewed for a new job, giving a speech, or taking a test. It's natural for them to look on the bright side and expect the best. And things do seem to work out for them most of the time.

Well, if nothing else, a gratitude journal is all about focusing on the positive things in your life.

They Make You Healthier

People who keep gratitude journals also say they experience fewer health problems than they did before they started journaling. This is especially true of ailments that can be linked to stress, like headaches and gastrointestinal problems.

However, people who suffer from other types of illnesses can benefit too. For example, they might experience fewer symptoms, or the symptoms they do have might be less severe than they were before.

They Help You Sleep Better at Night

Do you have trouble falling asleep at night? Maybe you spend half an hour (if not more) tossing and turning before you finally drop off. Or, even if you don't have trouble actually falling asleep, maybe your sleep doesn't feel all that restful, and it feels like you wake up feeling more tired than you did when you went to bed.

Well, in either case, a gratitude journal can help.

One study found that some people fell asleep faster after they started keeping a gratitude journal than they did before. Their sleep also tended to be more restful. So instead of waking up feeling groggy and barely able to function, they woke up feeling refreshed, invigorated, and ready to take on the challenges of the day.

It can be hard to believe that writing down a few things you are grateful for can have much of an impact on your life. But ask anyone who keeps a gratitude journal, and they'll be happy to tell you how much it has changed their lives for the better. But don't take their word for it. Try it for yourself. Every day for the next month, spend a few minutes every day writing down at least 3 things you're grateful for. Then you'll get to experience the benefits of gratitude journaling first hand.

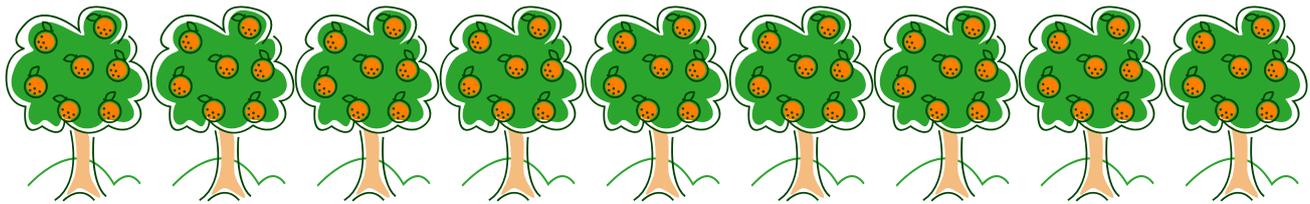
Women's Group held on the last Friday of every month. A friendly informal meeting giving opportunity to make new friends, and share experiences. **1-3pm meet at our rooms, Queens Building**

The 2014 Dunedin Midwinter Carnival will be held on **Saturday 21st of June**, which is the date of the Winter Solstice - the longest night and the shortest day of the year!

This event includes lantern making, dancers, drummers, and stilt performers and all of this adds to making the magical and awe-inspiring experience for Dunedin people. This is a great excuse to wrap up in warm clothes, join in with the festive activities, while at the same time combating some of the winter blues. If you want to get actively involved by volunteering, or if you would like more information call 477-3350 or email

info@midwintercarnival.co.nz

Taken from <http://www.midwintercarnival.co.nz/>



Something to brighten up winter

Quite interesting facts about orange. *Compiled by Molly Oldfield & John Mitchinson Feb 2011*

(from the brains behind QI)

Fruit or colour?

The fruit came before the colour. The word “orange” derives from the Arabic naranj and arrived in English as “narange” in the 14th century, gradually losing the initial “n”. This process is called wrong word division and also left us with apron (from naperon) and umpire (from noumpere). Orange was first used as the name for a colour in 1542

What colour is an orange?

Oranges are unknown in the wild. They are a hybrid of tangerines and the pomelo or “Chinese grapefruit” (which is pale green or yellow), and were first cultivated in south-east Asia. They weren’t orange, but green, and Vietnamese oranges and Thai tangerines are still bright green on the outside and orange inside.

So how have they ended up giving their name to a colour? It’s because oranges are a subtropical, not tropical fruit. The colour of an orange depends on where it grows. In more temperate climates, its green skin turns orange when the weather cools; but in countries where it’s always hot, the chlorophyll is preserved and the fruit stays green.

How ripe is my orange? You can’t tell the ripeness of an orange by its colour, no matter where it’s from. If an orange is unpicked, it can stay on the tree until the next season, during which time fluctuations in temperature can make it turn from green to orange and back to green again without the quality or flavour being affected.

Orange juice Although its origins are in south-east Asia, the first New World orange trees were planted in Florida in 1513 by Spanish explorer Juan Ponce de León. Brazil now grows a third of all oranges in the world, of which 85 per cent are used for juice. Brazil’s Cutrale company produces one glass in five of all the orange juice drunk in the world. You don’t see it on packaging as it exports the concentrate, which is then turned into juice and listed as a product of the importing country. It takes 50 glasses of water to grow enough oranges to make one glass of orange juice.