

Advice for the Home Team Toolbox

by Dr. Debi Warner



Dear Dr. Debi,

We are worried that the long nights will affect our moods; can you shed some light on this? Signed, In the Dark

Dear Sunshine,

Those long nights that come upon us can certainly make a dent in how we feel. At first we may feel a little disconnected, especially when the clocks were changed. But that is not the whole story. It is a cool thing to understand, and see what you can do about this in your own house to lighten the impact.

What goes on with the winter light? Well, there is a biological sensor just behind your eyes that seems to clock the type, amount, and intensity of light that you get every day. This information is transmitted to your nervous system and usually keeps it regulated for alertness, sleep cycles, and other ways the brain may regulate the body. When we get less light or poor quality light, we can become out of kilter in several ways and possibly even become deeply affected.

Most everyone will feel some effect of winter light: A little less energy, less apt to jump out of your chair to do something. Some changes in sleep, although with the clock change, it may be hard to figure which to attribute this to. Perhaps some changes in appetite, maybe more food urges or eating frequency. Perhaps fewer happy moods, but maybe more settled moods. There can be a slight numbing of our senses that would not be noticeable except when it dissipates on a great day of sunshine. Altogether, this might not be extreme or even remarkable, but most people have a tinge of this going on.

The problems can get deeper in some folks, causing more significant changes that cannot be missed. Some folks can find they lose all energy. They may be unable to resist food urges and gain weight. They may have sour or sad moods and not be able to kick them selves into action. That sort of situation ought to receive some attention. Lots can be done for all levels of this effect.

November is not too late to start changing the lighting in your home to keep this from worsening. You can also start to boost yourself out of it, with the right lighting properly used.

How about general lighting in your home? You can bring broader sunshine into your home with skylights,

lamps, and special bulbs.

Shy about skylights? Northern winters do have snow, but the skylights designed and recommended up North are designed to withstand snowfalls and avoid ice dams or leaks. There are even tubular skylights for rooms that are far from any roof. These can bring 95% of the sunlight all the way down the tube to the inner room for a bright daytime effect.

Need a longer day? You will want to have broad-spectrum light bulbs and lamps to give you more of the light that you know is in that rainbow the sun carries to us. There is a risk of ultraviolet light emitted from lamps, so check the ratings on that, too. There are bulbs that have been designed to address this problem made by several manufacturers and available at some local lumberyards and lighting dealers.

There are some folks who should not seek too much sunlight – real or artificial – such as folks with macular degeneration. So, check with your physician about your lighting plans.

Now, about the therapeutic lamps we have all heard about. I have noticed that finally the price has gone into the reasonable realm under \$100 for such a lamp. This lamp is to be used when you wake up in the morning, at close range for about a half hour, and can be done while you read the paper. The light is bright, but not awful; it is like going to the beach. Most people really like it and keep it up because it feels good.

You will want to have someone advise you if you are using a therapeutic lamp, because sometimes it can make a person overly energetic and out of wack, or it might need some tweaking to work to its fullest. So, check in with your physician or counselor please for good measure.

Another aspect of lighting and mood is to keep more lights on, surrounding your sitting space. If you are saving money by sitting next to one lonely lamp, you may get an isolated feeling, but if you can raise your eyes and see some other sections of living area lit up and inviting your gaze or visit, you may be more likely to get up and move around, getting exercise, and also have a generally more secure feeling.

I have links and references on my website for these materials and some quizzes that can help you see how far this is affecting you. Come & visit & while you are there, leave me a note. I'd love to hear from you all.

Happy Home Team!

Dr. Debi

Dr. Debi Warner is the Founder of Renovation Psychology® radio host, and author of the book, Putting the Home Team to Work, available now online at RenovationPsychology.com. Dr. Debi provides advice for greater domestic harmony to folks who are renovating their home – for True Home Improvement. This column is offered for enjoyment and enhancement and is not intended to replace your personal medical care. Photo by Bob Jenks, St. Johnsbury, Vt.

Dr. Debi has a consultation practice, from her studio in Littleton, NH, with house calls all over the East coast.

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