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# The RIDER REPORT

## Medical Transcription Services

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### Tips for Enjoying the Post-Holiday Season

**Embrace the New Calendar Year:** January is a unique month. It's the only one that marks the beginning of a new year – a clean slate upon which you can build anew. After the holidays, revel in the fact that you can now start fresh, and go with gusto after the goals you've been delaying. For some, this might include a New Year's Resolution or two, but even better, take this time to let go of any regret, guilt or anxiety from events that occurred in the year prior, and give yourself permission to start this one in a new, better frame of mind.

**Prepare for the Letdown in Advance:** If you know you tend to feel sad in the post-holiday season, next year prepare for it in advance. Make a point to plan a few special outings in January and February. Invite family members and friends over for a post-holiday get-together. You could even plan a vacation. This year, it's not too late to take advantage of this... depending on your interests, you may enjoy a family day spent ice skating or downhill skiing. Or you might take advantage of your now open social calendar and catch up on a novel or two you've been meaning to read, or a scrapbooking project you've been meaning to finish. The point is to embrace the highlights of the remaining winter months; though they may be hard to see at times, they are most definitely there if you're willing to find them.

**Eliminate or Cut Back on Sugar:** One thing most people do not do during the holidays is skimp on sweets, which is why you should definitely consider cutting back now, especially if you're feeling down. Sugar impacts your mood on a number of levels, not the least of which is causing spikes and crashes to your blood sugar level, which can make you feel like you're riding an emotional roller coaster. Sugar also suppresses a growth hormone in your brain called BDNF, levels of which are low in people with depression. Eating sugar also leads to chronic inflammation in your body, which also increases your risk of depression. Even if you're just blue, not actually depressed, you may find that eliminating sugar from your diet leads to significant improvements in your mood and energy levels.

**Exercise:** Resist the urge to hibernate the rest of the winter away and get moving instead! When you exercise, it releases endorphins in your brain, which are natural mood lifters. It also helps to reduce symptoms of anxiety<sup>2</sup> and even switches on genes that increase your brain's level of galanin, a neurotransmitter that "tones down" your body's stress response. Most researchers agree that sporadic workouts here and there will not give you the mood-boosting effects that exercise is truly capable of. For best results, you've got to exercise regularly and keep at it. Eventually, likely within a few weeks, you'll notice a difference. As an aside, exercise will help you sleep better, too, and this is another component of beating a "blah" mood. If you're tired, you're much more likely to be cranky and irritable, but after a good night's sleep it's easier to keep a positive outlook. Specifically, researchers found that 150 minutes of moderate to vigorous activity a week led to a 65 percent improvement in sleep quality, and made people feel less sleepy during the day<sup>4</sup> – so be sure to take advantage of this natural mood-boosting tool.

**Consider Using a Sun Lamp or Blue Light Therapy:** Dark, cold winter days with less sunshine can lead to lower serotonin levels and an even lower mood. Further, your body produces vitamin D via your skin after exposure to the sun, which means your levels can become dangerously low in the winter months – and adequate vitamin D levels have been found to help lift your mood during the winter. If you can't get regular sun exposure, a sun lamp may help brighten your mood. Alternatively, a simple blood test by your physician can tell you where your vitamin D levels fall, and if yours are low you may benefit from a **vitamin D supplement**. You can also try light therapy using blue light, which is plentiful outdoors, as studies have also shown that exposure to blue light (as opposed to the light given off by standard light bulbs or even the light used in light-box therapy) may also boost mood.<sup>5</sup>

**Support Your Mood with Supplements:** Sometimes you can use a bit of extra help from natural supplements that support your general well-being. The following are particularly known for their effectiveness in mood support:

- **Acetyl L-Carnitine**, which is believed to be most helpful in supporting energy function in the brain.
- **Calcium and Magnesium**, a blend of calcium and magnesium offers added support for proper immune, muscle and nerve function
- **Pure Fish Oil**, which contains EPA and DHA, which are the same omega-3 fatty acids found in fatty fishes
- **St. John's Wort**, an extensively studied, time-tested botanical best known to promote a healthy, positive mood, with results often felt in just 4 to 6 weeks

These can be used on their own or, even better, in addition to the steps above to help optimize your feelings of well-being. One final thought: whenever you find winter is bringing you down, remember that once winter begins, spring is not far behind.

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