

unexpectedly, the spouse left behind at home may be in dire need of a substitute caregiver. Or, in the worst-case scenario, the well spouse may die from a sudden stroke, etc. If other family members do not live locally and are not aware of basic information about the couple's finances, medical conditions and doctors, medications, legal documents, insurance, etc., it can be extremely difficult for anyone else to step in as substitute caregiver.

Caregivers often neglect their own physical and mental health and may experience depression as well. The focus is on the needs of the ill or disabled partner and the caregiver's needs often are overlooked. The well spouse may attempt to cover up the real situation in order to not worry other family members or to protect their own privacy. In order to avoid the chaos an unexpected illness or death of a caregiver, families need to have that conversation (as described in our January newsletter) and make backup plans. Most of us would prefer to ignore potential problems that may arise, but in the case of caregiving, pre-planning can make all the difference.

*Adapted from Backup Plans, Neurology Now Oct./Nov. 2017*

## Helping Seniors Beat the Winter Blues



If you struggle with the “winter blues” you know how difficult it can be to make it through the holiday season. Although winter brings cheerful, festive holidays, it also

means less sunlight, shorter days and colder weather. This can result in a lack of exercise, more sleep, less interest in activities, social withdrawal, unhealthy eating and a general sense of feeling down.

Medically termed seasonal affective disorder (SAD), the condition can happen at the onset of any season. However, winter depression or winter blues are the most common. What happens to a person's mood when they lack exposure to daylight creates a domino effect. Serotonin and melatonin levels both drop significantly which causes major changes in sleep and mood—two critical components to overall health and wellness.

Seniors are especially vulnerable to winter-onset SAD. Since they are generally less active, capable and independent it can be a particularly challenging time of year to get through. When you add cold winter weather to the mix, it only makes matters worse. The result is a senior that feels lonely, isolated and depressed.



Fortunately, there are activities to help seniors battle the winter blues. Whether you're a loved one or caregiver, here are some ideas that might help...

Get enough exercise. Cold temperatures and winter weather can sometimes make it challenging to get outside. Shopping malls are a great place to get out of the house and get moving.

Eat healthily. Winter may put us into hibernation mode which causes us to reach