



The end of Summer

Do you often feel tired or run down or do you have difficulty falling asleep at night? You may be suffering from Seasonal Affective Disorder, writes Fiona Hoban.



I WINCED when a friend of mine commented that Reek Sunday (the last Sunday in July, when thousands climb Croagh Patrick in Co Mayo) signalled the “death of summer”.

Many of us get that sense of loss mixed with dread when we realise summer is coming to a close. Like children reluctant to accept our impending bedtime, we hold out hope for an Indian summer in an attempt to stave off the inevitable approach of autumn: please, just five more minutes.

Of course, summer’s not all about the weather; it can be a time to throw the routine out the window, enjoy the long evenings or catch up with friends and family that may be visiting.

So it’s no wonder that many of us sigh resignedly when talk of school uniforms and routine creeps into conversation. “Where did the summer go?” is often asked as that emotionally

OCTOBER’S PARTY

by George Cooper

October gave a party
The leaves by hundreds came
The chestnuts, oaks and maples
And leaves of every name
The sunshine spread a carpet
And everything was grand
Miss weather led the dancing
Professor wind the band

charged, often divisive, subject of Christmas lurks on the horizon.

There are pluses and minuses to everything, I suppose. However, whether summer is your favourite time of year or not, I think it’s fair to say that a period of adjustment is needed as we face into the autumn and subsequent winter.

One of the most notable adjustments to be made is that of the days getting

shorter as we have less exposure to daily sunlight. Even though the days begin to shorten from 21 June, it’s usually about now that we can see a real difference. Reduced exposure to daylight can disrupt our body clock’s rhythm in knowing when to sleep and when to wake. It can also lead to a drop in melatonin levels. This hormone plays a role in sleep patterns and mood. Serotonin levels can also drop and this may lead to a low or depressed mood.

SAD (Seasonal Affective Disorder) is directly related to such a reduction in exposure to sunlight. Its symptoms can be anything from a depressed mood, to increased anxiety, lethargy and changes in appetite. There is no medical test you can take for SAD. Therefore, it can be difficult to diagnose. However, health professionals recognise that when symptoms occur at the same time of

year, each year, and when there is no other explanation, then it's likely you're affected by SAD.

Some medical professionals prescribe anti-depressants while others recommend complementary therapies such as light therapy, yoga and acupuncture.

The saying goes that if you fail to plan, you plan to fail, so with a little bit of preparation we can head into the final quarter of 2011 with lots to look forward to.

In that sense, it's not so much about the end of summer as it is birth of autumn.

PREPARE FOR AUTUMN

1. Light therapy, sun lamps and dawn simulators can help compensate for loss of natural daylight.
2. Omega 3 fatty acids can relieve depressed or low mood.
3. Stay connected – keep in touch with friends and family.
4. Join an exercise class – there are great deals at the moment and exercise always increases serotonin levels.

5. Plan something to look forward to – even a girly night in.
6. Start saving, no matter how little, for Christmas.
7. Maximise brightness in your home or office – don't keep the curtains drawn all day.
8. Pick blackberries now and make some jams or compotes and enjoy a little taste of summer in winter.
9. Start an evening course – check out the local VECs.
10. Get out and about – fresh air is good for you, even if there's no sun.

10 THINGS TO LOOK FORWARD TO THIS AUTUMN

1. Better television shows.
2. Plenty of evening classes.
3. Open fires.
4. Hot toddies.
5. The smell of cloves, cinnamon.
6. Hearty soups, casseroles, stews.
7. Flannel sheets and heavy duvets.
8. Bed socks and a good book to read before sleep – preferably with rain on the window.
9. Flickering candles.
10. Cosy nights in. ★

SELF TEST FOR SAD

- Do you often feel tired or run down?
- Do you have difficulty falling asleep at night?
- Do you have difficulty getting up in the morning?
- Do you have pain or headaches that are not due to a known illness?
- Are you inclined to gain or lose weight over the winter months?
- Has your sex drive diminished?
- Does your mood turn for the worse as winter approaches?
- Do you have trouble concentrating or remembering things?
- Do you develop cravings for certain food, particularly carbs?
- Do you lose interest in things you usually enjoy?

If you answer 'yes' to most of the above, you may well be experiencing SAD.





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