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The windy, blustery days of early spring are giving way to budding trees and blooming crocuses. The birds are migrating north, and the chipmunks emerge from their hibernating spots. The dogs in the park are especially frisky; lawns and flowers burst into new color. And, if we slow down to notice, people also tend to behave differently.

For many people, spring brings restlessness and abundant energy. We have an urge to take care of tasks we have ignored, or simply yearn to get away. We experience a level of momentum that makes us want to clean out our closets or garages, repaint our bedrooms, or reinvent our lives.

It is known as “spring fever.” Triggered by the spring equinox, it is a term applied to several sets of physical and psychological symptoms associated with the arrival of longer sunny days. In fact, scientists who study the relationship between a person’s body clock and mood and behavior, have found that many of our biological and behavioral processes follow daily, monthly, and yearly cycles.1

Studies show that humans have strong seasonal rhythms that may be more pronounced in some people than for others. At least half of the people who live in the northern latitudes experience a pattern of mental changes such as brighter mood, positive attitude, enthusiasm, and experience a feeling of restlessness. A man’s sperm count is higher. It’s easier to lose weight. Many people walk around randomly smiling at strangers.1,2

Possible Causes

The syndrome known as spring fever has been studied for a long time. The cause and effect is not easily identifiable or conclusive. However, research indicates what was once thought of as purely psychological tendencies of euphoria due to spring fever also have physiological symptoms with ailments such as allergies, migraine headaches, insomnia, and fatigue, as well as psychological afflictions such as depression.2

A popular hypothesis suggests that the longer days of spring, specifically the bright sunny days, manipulate the brain, which in turn influences moods and energy levels. Several studies indicate that early morning bright light is acutely a vital indicator for humans in keeping the body synchronized.2,3 Other theories argue that spring fever is caused by the warm weather, not by the increase in daylight.

However, there is evidence that light plays a role in human mood and sleep patterns.3 The light is measured by the eyes and relayed to the pineal gland, tucked at the base of the cerebrum, which controls the secretion of melatonin, a hormone that regulates the daily biological clock and controls mood and energy levels. As the spring days get longer, melatonin starts to decrease and people become more energized. Sex drive, enthusiasm, and confidence all increase. Conversely, as days get shorter in the winter, melatonin builds up; people feel sluggish and lethargic and tend to slow down.3

Other researchers believe that light is just one factor. Smell, sight, and hearing are also involved, perhaps linked to memories of past experiences. The fragrant aroma and soft winds of spring can trigger tremendous emotional responses. Senses that have been severely deprived during the winter are assaulted in the spring by stimuli, which can make people unusually giddy.4,5

Psychological Effects

There are pronounced correlations between moods, behavior, and the arrival of spring. Although spring fever is not a medical diagnosis, there has been a great deal of research on how seasonal changes affect our mood and behavior. However, the precise cause for our renewed energy remains somewhat elusive and largely anecdotal. What we do know is that intense winter blues or seasonal affective disorder (SAD) is real.

After an unusually harsh winter, most of us are ready for the milder and sunny days of spring. Unfortunately, for those who suffer with SAD, spring fever causes great distress. For those individuals, spring fever intensifies the sense of loneliness and hopelessness. Epidemiological studies find that SAD is more common in women and in younger adults. According to some doctors, it may not be all psychological; biologically, the bodies of SAD sufferers experience real physical stress with seasonal changes. Suicidal behavior is associated with mood, especially depression. Depression has components of both environmental and psychosocial stressors. Unfortunately, hospitals report that suicides and depression peak during the spring months.6

Cleaning and Clearing

But for most of us, being outside in pleasant weather really offers a way to reset our attitude, making spring the perfect time for renewing our goals. Spring is also traditionally associated with creativity and for waking up the opportunities that lay dormant throughout the winter.
months. It drives us to organize aspects of our lives. It is the perfect time to renew enthusiasm and plans for a fresh start on our health and fitness resolutions.

Cleaning up and clearing away clutter is one great way to productively use spring fever energy. It is a great time to explore what works best for us, to do a spring cleaning of the mind. Consider getting rid of ideas and thoughts that may have weighed us down during the winter. Is it time to consider some of our own needs? Perhaps to take an honest look at our relationships and take a look at which are nurturing and which are not. Think about schedules and time commitments. Are we using them productively, or are they robbing us of energy and increasing our stress?

We all have habits. Does it make sense to continue in the same way, or should we make changes that reflect better what we want for ourselves? Spring renews our energy for self-improvement projects. It improves our ability to plan and make decisions. We experience renewed optimism, creativity, hope, and transformation.

Variety is essential in maintaining a healthy lifestyle. If we are in a rut, overstressed, not eating well or not getting any exercise, we need to vary our routines. Regularly implementing just one small change in our routine can make a world of difference. There is no need to do everything at once. Start with one or two changes, perhaps introduce a new physical activity in your day. Set the pace that works for you. Maybe take a walk during the lunch hour. Take the stairs instead of the elevator or escalator whenever possible, and walk in place while watching TV. Increased outside activities in warmer weather also require adequate amounts of water.

Our bodies need a variety of foods to provide the nutrition and energy to function properly. The arrival of spring brings thoughts of gardens and a healthy diet that includes fresh fruits and vegetables. Spring is also a good time to clarify our minds. Emotional clutter jumbles our thinking, and if we spend all our time and energy on the small stuff, we may never have room for the things that are important to us. Little piles of things start to build up, and we often put off dealing with the clutter until we are overwhelmed. Unfortunately, negative thoughts can bring negative things into our lives. We need to change every negative thought into positive thinking and action.

Rebirth and Rejuvenation

In the spring, we each have the opportunity to plant new seeds of positive change in our lives. Winter keeps us indoors, looking inward. Spring takes us outside, out of our homes and out of ourselves. It is the time where we look ahead to summer, and spring is a perfect time to remember that each day is a new possibility.

Spring fever is the sum of all feelings related to the season. By being aware of the intense emotions that come with spring fever, we have the opportunity to grow and develop, to be more thoughtful about our actions, to enhance ourselves, and to consciously bring more balance into our lives.

References


April hath put a spirit of youth in everything.

William Shakespeare

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