

HOW TO MANAGE THE DARK SEASON 28.11.24

BOOST YOUR MENTAL HEALTH

PIA KOKKO, BRIEF THERAPIST

KAAMOS aka POLAR NIGHT aka WHEN IT'S DARK AFTER WORK AT 4pm

This winter the Polar Night lasts from round 24th of November until 17th of January (in Utsjoki)



# PIA KOKKO

Solution Focused Brief Therapist, Entrepreneur

Bachelor in Social Sciences

BA Photography + MA Digital Communication

Phototherapy practitioner:

Empowering Photography + Contemplative  
Photography

Currently working as therapist, social educator,  
advisor in cultural wellbeing services and diversity  
issues.

Lived & worked +13 yrs abroad (USA, NL, BE).  
Previous working life in Cultural Management,  
Communications and EU Policies.





# CONTENT

- THE POLAR NIGHT EFFECT
- SEASONAL & HOLISTIC APPROACH
- DO I NEED TO WORRY?
- TOOLKIT



# THE POLAR NIGHT EFFECT

28.11.2024 | VAASA

PHOTO BY STEIN EGIL LILAND | PEXELS

[WWW.PIAKOKKO.COM](http://WWW.PIAKOKKO.COM)

# THE POLAR NIGHT EFFECT (KAAMOSMASENNUS)

- Winter blues aka SAD (Seasonal Affective Disorder) is a recognised condition since 1984 in the US
- Depression related to changes in seasons: amount of natural light influences hormone production (melatonin & serotonin) —> some get SAD in the spring —> individual "body clocks"
- Winter SAD usually starts in Oct, worst in Nov-Jan, eases end of February
- Affects 1-2% of the population > 1 in 10 in Finland has SAD
- 20-30% affected with related symptoms, without state of depression > Winter Exhaustion (subsyndromal winter-SAD)
- Starts at the age of 20-30, repeats annually
- 10 year study showed: 15% heal, 45% milder symptoms, 40% still affected

# COMMON SYMPTOMS

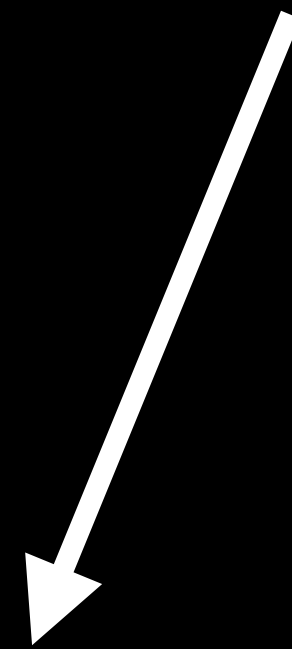
- Increased appetite, cravings for sweets or carbohydrates
- Drastic changes in weight
- Increased need of sleep or not restoring sleep
- Depressive feelings, lost meaningfulness
- Loss of interest in activities you generally enjoy
- Low energy or feeling draggy
- Being easily aggravated
- Increased anxiety
- Problems focusing
- Feelings of hopelessness, worthlessness, guilt or indecisiveness
- Regular thoughts about death or suicide (contact health care services!!)



STRESS



ANXIETY



DEPRESSION







# SEASONAL & HOLISTIC APPROACH

28.11.2024 | VAASA

PHOTO BY STEIN EFRANCESCO UNGARO | PEXELS

[WWW.PIAKOKKO.COM](http://WWW.PIAKOKKO.COM)

# SEASONAL & HOLISTIC APPROACH

- **What is normal and what is an appropriate natural reaction?**
- Does having less energy automatically mean depression?  
Is my life in balance on all areas?  
Am I taking good **care of myself?**
- Having an emotional reaction / a strong feeling —> a mental health issue?
- Could it be normal to feel this in these circumstances / with this workload / having been this busy / when adapting to a new country & climate?

# SEASONAL & HOLISTIC APPROACH

- The nature slows down to hibernate —> could this be a natural need?
- Self-compassion & introspection
- Listening to yourself vs society's demands —> setting boundaries





DO I NEED TO WORRY?

28.11.2024 | VAASA

PHOTO BY STEIN CRAIG ADDERLEY | PEXELS

[WWW.PIAKOKKO.COM](http://WWW.PIAKOKKO.COM)

# DO I NEED TO WORRY?

- Is your **ability to function** in day to day life **significantly reduced**?
- Have I tried to care for myself?
- How is my work-life balance?
- [Depression test online](#)



It's important to **SEEK PROFESSIONAL HELP** if you experience any of the following symptoms:

- Persistent sadness or hopelessness lasting more than two weeks
- Difficulty functioning at work, school, or in relationships
- Significant loss of interest in activities you once enjoyed
- Significant changes in appetite, weight, or sleep patterns
- Feelings of worthlessness or excessive guilt
- Thoughts of self-harm or suicide

# WHERE TO FIN PROFESSIONAL HELP?

- Work / university health care services
- Ostrobothnian County of Wellbeing Services:  
Through Care Needs Assessment tel. 06 218 9000  
Mental Health Nurse 24/7 tel. 06 213 2009

- [MIELI Crisis Helpline in English tel. 09 2525 0116](tel:0925250116)

Crisis Center Valo, Vaasa

(mon - thur from 9-14) tel. 044 979 2439 [info@mielipohjanmaa.fi](mailto:info@mielipohjanmaa.fi)

- Private sector medical & therapy services

# TOOLKIT



# How do everyday choices affect your mental health?



## HAND OF MENTAL HEALTH TEND DAILY TO THE NEEDS OF EACH FINGER

- SLEEP AND REST
- FOOD & EATING HABITS
- RELATIONSHIPS & EMOTIONS
- EXERCISE & MINDFULNESS
- CREATIVITY & PLEASURE
- DAILY RHYTHM
- VALUES & CHOICES

BRIEF THERAPY



PHOTO BY ANTONI SHKRABA | PEXELS

LIGHT THERAPY



SMALL GOALS & BIG VICTORIES



PHOTO BY NINA UHLIKOVA | PEXELS

# PERSONAL TOOLKIT

- **PLAN** a reasonable daily schedule —> aim for **feeling of success** (being able to fulfil the planned)
- **REWARD** yourself of your accomplishments
- Look at things from **ANOTHER PERSPECTIVE**:  
What does this winter period allow me to do?  
What aspects in it please me?
- **LIST** things (to do) which make you feel good & energetic  
—> **DO MORE** of these each day!  
(draft also a list of things you should avoid as they make you feel low)
- **PERSONAL BOOST OBJECT**  
Choose an image/object that gives you positive emotions. Carry it with you. When needed, take a moment with your personal boost object, breathe and **feel the feelings** it send back to you!



“Happiness can be found, even in the darkest of times, if one only remembers to turn on the light.”

– J.K. ROWLING, HARRY POTTER AND  
THE PRISONER OF AZKABAN

THANK YOU FOR  
YOUR ATTENTION!

PIA KOKKO

Contact:

[www.piakokko.com](http://www.piakokko.com)

Tel. 044 799 1180

[piamrt@me.com](mailto:piamrt@me.com)



# SOURCES

- YLE. Kaamos alkaa tänään Utsjoella. 24.11.24. <https://yle.fi/a/74-20126771>
- Duodecim:  
Kaamosmasennus. <https://www.terveyskirjasto.fi/dlk00377#refs> Kaamosmasennus ja kaamosväsymys <https://www.duodecimlehti.fi/duo95458>
- Mieli ry. Hand of Mental Health. <https://mieli.fi/en/materials/hand-of-mental-health/>
- Integrative Psychotherapy. Winter Blues: Predict the Unpredictable. <https://integrativepsych.co/new-blog/winter-depression-seasonal-depression>
- Mind Diagnostics, Depression Test. <https://www.mind-diagnostics.org>