

9046 - Seasonal Affective Disorder



What is SAD? Seasonal Affective Disorder, or SAD, is a mild to moderate form of depression that comes on as the summer changes into the fall and winter seasons. SAD is a cyclical depression where the feelings of “winter blues” come back each winter season.

Symptoms:

- Increased feelings of lethargy
- Difficulty waking up in the mornings as the days get shorter
- Oversleeping
- Difficulty concentrating and thinking creatively in comparison to the summer months
- Incorrectly blaming oneself for things that go wrong
- Difficulty performing tasks that normally seem to be easy/enjoyable
- Increased craving for carbohydrate-rich food like chocolate and soda

Source: Giorgio Piccoli, 2007. Beating the Winter Blues: A practical guide on how to get Through the Winter at Cornell

Causes: There is not a single known cause for SAD. More likely than not it's a combination of age, gender, heredity and your body's natural chemical makeup. Here are three contributors to SAD:

1. Circadian Rhythm – This is your body's internal clock. Some researchers believe that during the shorter days of the winter months your internal clock is thrown off and your body has trouble regulating when to sleep and be awake.
2. Melatonin – This is a sleep related hormone that increases during the dark months. This increase may lead to depression.
3. Serotonin – This is a “feel good” neurotransmitter in the brain. A drop in sunlight can lead to a drop in Serotonin as well.

Source: Mayo Clinic Staff. Seasonal Affective Disorder. September 24th, 2007.

Risk Factors: Women are more likely than men to be affected by SAD. There is also a slight heredity factor to SAD. So if someone in your immediate family is affected, your chances of being affected by SAD are also increased. Lastly, living in the more northern latitudes may contribute to SAD. The further away from equator you live the higher your risk of being affected by SAD.

Source: CMHA October 10, 2007. Are Dark Days Getting You Down?

