



# Getting Through the Dark Months

## Week 1: Introduction to SAD

### What is Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD)?

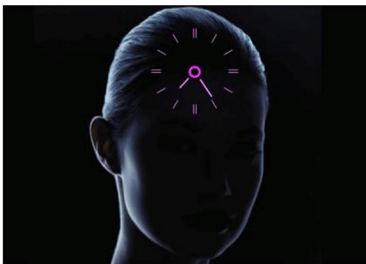
SAD is a well-defined clinical diagnosis that's related to the **shortening of daylight hours**. It is a **mild to moderate form of depression** that comes on as the summer changes into the fall and winter seasons. A key feature of SAD is its **cyclical** pattern – it appears each year as the seasons change, and goes away usually during spring and summer (Piccoll, 2007).

#### Symptoms

- Increased feelings of lethargy
- Difficulty waking up when the days get shorter
- Oversleeping
- Difficulty concentrating and thinking creatively compared to summer months
- Incorrectly blaming oneself when things go wrong
- Difficulty doing tasks that are normally easy or enjoyable
- Increased craving for carbohydrate-rich food (e.g., chocolate, sugary beverages)



(Piccoll, 2007)



### 3 Main Contributors to SAD

1. **Circadian Rhythm** is your body's internal clock. Some researchers believe that the shorter days during the winter months "confuse" your internal clock. Thus, your body has trouble regulating when to sleep and wake up.
2. **Melatonin** is a sleep related hormone that increases during the dark months. This increase may lead to depression.
3. **Serotonin** is a "feel good" neurotransmitter in the brain. Less sunlight can lead to a drop in serotonin. ([www.mayoclinic.com](http://www.mayoclinic.com), 2007)

“People with SAD can feel a sense of **hibernation...** and feel **withdrawn**, have **low energy, oversleep**, and **put on weight**. Without treatment, symptoms generally last until the days start getting longer.”  
(National Institute of Health, 2013).

#### Risk Factors

- **Women** (more than men)
- People **over the age of 20**
- Those with **immediate family members who have been affected**
- Those living in the more **northern latitudes**

(Canadian Mental Health Association, 2004).

**If you suffer from SAD, please connect with EAP or your EWSNetwork wellness consultant.**

Piccoli, G. (2007). Beating the Winter Blues: A practical guide on how to get through winter at Cornell. Cornell University, Gannett Health Services.

Canadian Mental Health Association. (2004). Seasonal Affective Disorder.

Mayo Clinic Staff (2007). Seasonal Affective Disorder. Retrieved from [www.mayoclinic.com](http://www.mayoclinic.com)

