

GETTING THROUGH THE DARK MONTHS

AN 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's 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 usually goes away during spring and summer.

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 cravings for carbohydrate-rich foods (e.g. chocolate, sugary beverages)



The 3 Main Contributors to SAD

Circadian Rhythm

It's your body's internal clock. Researchers believe that the winter's shorter days confuse your internal clock. Thus, your body has trouble regulating when to sleep and wake up.

Melatonin

It's a sleep-related hormone that increases during the dark months. This increase may lead to depression.

Serotonin

It's a feel-good neurotransmitter in the brain. Less sunlight can lead to a drop in serotonin.



People with SAD can feel **withdrawn**, have **low energy**, **oversleep**, and **put on weight**. Without treatment, symptoms generally last until the days begin to get longer.

Risk Factors

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

If you suffer from SAD, please connect with EAP or your EWSNetwork health coach.

Sources: Picco, 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
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