

Chasing the SAD Days Away



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Seasonal depression, often called Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD), is a depression that occurs each year at the same time, usually starting in fall or winter and ending in spring or early summer.

The winter months for most in the U.S. promise short days, cold weather and gloomy skies for at least three months and maybe more, depending on where you live. Most people with seasonal affective disorder have symptoms that start in the fall and may continue into the winter months, zapping energy and causing feelings of moodiness. Don't brush off that yearly feeling as simply a case of the "winter blues" or a seasonal funk that you have to tough out on your own — you may have Seasonal Affective Disorder. Here is some information regarding SAD that will help you better understand this disorder and find out if it may be affecting you or someone you love.

Symptoms of Winter SAD

- Fatigue
- Increased need for sleep
- Decreased levels of energy
- Weight gain
- Increase in appetite
- Difficulty concentrating
- Increased desire to be alone

How Common is SAD?

- 4 to 6 percent of the U.S. population suffers from SAD, while 10-20 percent may suffer from a milder form of the disorder
- Three-fourths of sufferers are women between the ages of 20-50

What Causes SAD?

- The actual cause of SAD is unknown although it is suspected that it is caused by changes in the availability of sunlight. Meaning, **less sunlight = less happiness.**
- Another theory is that brain chemicals that transmit information between nerves, called neurotransmitters (for example, serotonin), may be altered in individuals with SAD. It is believed that exposure to light can correct these imbalances.

If you have been diagnosed with SAD, here are some things you can do to help to prevent it from coming back:

- Try to spend some time outside every day, even when it's very cloudy. The effects of daylight are still beneficial.
- Eat a well-balanced diet and include sufficient amounts of vitamins and minerals as recommended by the FDA. This will help you have more energy even though your body is craving starchy and sweet foods.
- Try exercising for 30 minutes a day, three times a week.
- Seek professional counseling, if needed, during the winter months.
- Stay involved with your social circle and regular activities. This can be a tremendous means of support during winter months.

Remember that Seasonal Affective Disorder is nothing to be embarrassed about. If you think you may have some of the symptoms, you are encouraged to see your doctor.

Source: Mayo Clinic

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