

Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD)

Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD) is a type of recurrent depressive disorder that affects some people during the late fall and winter months, with symptoms resolving in late spring and summer. **A diagnosis is usually made after three or more consecutive winters in which symptoms have been experienced.**

For many, the disorder is a seriously disabling illness, which significantly impairs normal functioning and requires continuous medical treatment. For others, it is a condition that causes mild to moderate discomfort, but not severe suffering or significant dysfunction.

Causes:

It is generally believed that Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD) is caused by a biochemical imbalance in the hypothalamus due to the shortening of daylight hours and the lack of sunshine in the winter months. The pathophysiology of SAD, however, remains essentially elusive and unconfirmed.

Although some children and teenagers may experience Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD), the usual age of onset is between 20 and 30 years of age. The disorder is more common in women than in men. It is more common in northern geographic regions.

It is estimated that as many as 6 of every 100 people in the United States may suffer from Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD).

Symptoms:

- ❖ Desire to oversleep and difficulty staying awake; in some cases, disturbed sleep, with frequent or early morning waking.
- ❖ Decrease energy; fatigue; lethargy; decrease ability to carry out normal routine.
- ❖ Increase craving for carbohydrates, starches and sweets; weight gain.
- ❖ Moodiness; recurring feelings of sadness, misery, anger, guilt; increase interpersonal sensitivity; low self-esteem; sometimes, feelings of hopelessness and despair; sometimes, feelings of apathy and emotional numbness; in severe cases, thoughts of suicide.
- ❖ Increase tension; decrease concentration; restlessness; anxiety; increase temper outbursts; decrease ability to tolerate stress.
- ❖ Decrease interest or pleasure in usual activities; decrease interest in sex and physical contact; social avoidance or withdrawal,
- ❖ Most sufferers show signs of weakened immune system during the winter months and are more vulnerable to infections and other illnesses; for many there is an

increase in physical complaints such as headaches and stomach distress; for many there is increase absenteeism from school or work.

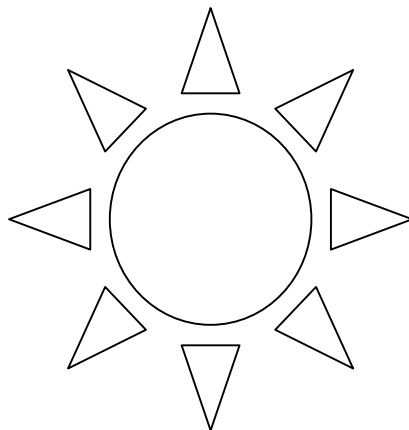
Treatment:

- ❖ Counseling is effective in helping individuals to develop or improve coping skills and stress management techniques.
- ❖ Stress management: Maintain a healthy diet; limit alcohol use; move your body; feed your spirit; balance your time between work and home life; find time to retreat, rest, relax, refresh; practice thought stopping and mindfulness meditation; get out into the fresh air and sunshine as much as possible; reach out and talk to family, friends, your medical doctor and/ or a counselor for guidance, support, and encouragement; find and join a support group.
- ❖ For many, anti-depressant medication is necessary and effective in managing symptoms, stabilizing mood and improving functioning.
- ❖ For some, full-spectrum fluorescent light therapy is effective in elevating mood and in symptom management. Research the Internet for treatment efficacy and product information.

Books:

Winter Blues: Seasonal Affective Disorder; What It Is and How to Overcome It, Revised and Updated by Norman E Rosenthal

[Positive Options for Seasonal Affective Disorder \(SAD\): Self-Help and Treatment](#) by Fiona Marshall, Peter Cheevers



For further information, assessment and referral, contact the Employee Assistance Program (EAP) at 607-255-1531