

Seasonal Affective Disorder

What is it?

It's the Winter Blues! Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD) is a mood disorder and affects about 10% of the U.S. population each year. SAD is diagnosed more often in women than men and is believed to be caused by a lack of exposure to daylight.

Symptoms:

Symptoms build up slowly in the late autumn and winter months and include: hopelessness, increased sleep, loss of interest in work or favorite activities, sluggish movements, social withdrawal, irritability, less energy or ability to concentrate, and increased appetite with weight gain.

Ways to beat SAD:

- Increase light exposure – make walking outside part of your day, open blinds or doors that block sunlight in your home
- Exercise – regular exercise relieves stress and anxiety and can make you feel better about yourself
- Eat healthy – avoid excess carbohydrates and sugar that make you feel lethargic & cause weight gain
- Get adequate and regular sleep – too little sleep can cause stress and irritability
- Do things that make you happy!

SAD Treatment:

- **Light therapy:** In light therapy, you sit in front of a specialized light therapy box that mimics outdoor light. This therapy appears to change neurotransmitter levels in the brain linked to mood. It is one of the first line treatments for SAD and generally starts working in 2-4 days.
- **Medications:** Some people benefit from the use of antidepressant medication, especially if symptoms are severe. Most anti-depressants take several weeks before they start to fully work and you notice a change in symptoms. Consult a physician for an appointment to discuss this option.
- **Psychotherapy/Counseling:** Although SAD is thought to be related to brain chemistry, your mood, thought patterns, and behaviors also add to the symptoms. Therapy can help you identify and change negative thoughts and behaviors that may be making you feel worse. Call your EAP!

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