

S. A. D. | Seasonal Affective Disorder

■ by Joy Bocanegra, MA, Licensed Clinical Professional Counselor

As the dark, gray days of fall and winter replace the sunnier days of spring and summer, many individuals find themselves experiencing SAD, Seasonal Affective Disorder. SAD, is a type of depression that occurs at the same time of year, usually in autumn and continuing through winter. According to the American Academy of Family Physicians, six out of every 100 people in the United States are affected by SAD. Symptoms may be mild at first and become more severe as the season progresses.



Typical symptoms include:

- Sadness
- Hopelessness
- Anxiety
- Fatigue
- Oversleeping
- Social Withdrawal
- Difficulty concentrating
- Loss of interest in activities once enjoyed
- Appetite change, craving starchy foods or sweets
- Weight change
- Irritability

Seasonal Affective Disorder is best treated with a combination of psychotherapy, light treatment and medication. Since a lack of bright light contributes to the cause of SAD, brightening up your environment is an important part of treatment. Make the most of sunlight by opening blinds and adding lighting where possible.

Light therapy, or phototherapy, has been used for 20 years and is linked to improving mood by creating a change in brain chemicals as one sits a few feet from a light therapy box. Time needed may vary from 30 minutes to 2 hours a day.

Get outside to walk, ski or ice skate. During exercise endorphins are released elevating our mood. Even on cloudy days outdoor light is helpful and spending time in nature can be soothing to the soul. Allow yourself to tune in to your senses, experiencing the sights, sounds and smells.

Seeking treatment early can prevent symptoms from becoming serious, making the winter months more manageable. ■



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Joy has helped many people suffering from S.A.D.

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