

## **Seasonal Affective Disorder**

**Seasonal depression, also called seasonal affective disorder (SAD), is a type of depression. It is triggered by the change of seasons. It typically begins in the fall with symptoms including sadness, lack of energy, oversleeping, and loss of interest in usual activities.**

**There is a milder version of SAD known as the ‘winter blues.’ It is normal to feel a little down during the colder months especially when it gets dark early each day. However, full SAD is a form of depression. Unlike the winter blues, SAD affects your daily life, including how you think and feel. About 5% of adults in the US experience SAD. It tends to begin in early adulthood (usually between the ages of 18 and 30).**

**Symptoms of SAD include: Sadness, feeling depressed most of each day; Carbohydrate cravings and weight gain, Extreme fatigue and lack of energy, Trouble concentrating, Feeling irritated or agitated, Withdrawal from social activities, and Insomnia.**

**While researchers are not exactly sure of the causes of SAD, lack of sunlight may trigger the condition if one is prone to getting it. Theories suggest the following can contribute to the onset of SAD: Biological clock changes caused by less sunlight. Your internal clock regulates mood, sleep and hormones. When it shifts, you are out of step with your routine and can’t adjust to changes in daylight length. Brain chemical imbalance may be caused when neurotransmitters send communications between nerves. These chemicals include serotonin, which contributes to feelings of happiness. If you are prone to SAD, you already have less serotonin activity. Sunlight helps regulate serotonin so shorter periods of daylight make the situation worse. Vitamin D deficiency can affect serotonin levels and mood. People with SAD often have stress, anxiety and negative thoughts about winter. Researchers are not sure if these thoughts are the cause or the effect of seasonal depression.**

**A treatment plan for SAD may include one or more of the following components: Light Therapy which is a bright light lamp which can help patients through frequent exposure. This light is about 20 times brighter than regular outdoor light. Cognitive Behavioral Therapy which is a type of talk therapy with a therapist. CBT produces the longest lasting positive effects of any treatment approach. Antidepressant Medication may be used alone or with light therapy. Spending time outdoors with exposure to sunlight may improve SAD symptoms. Vitamin D supplements may also help alleviate SAD symptoms.**

**If you are diagnosed with SAD, there are things you can do to manage it or even prevent it from recurring. Start using light therapy at the beginning of fall, before you experience SAD symptoms. Spend time outside every day, even if it’s cloudy. Daylight can help you feel better. Eat nutritious meals. While your body may crave starchy and sweet foods, stick to nutritious choices which provide enough vitamins and minerals for the energy you need. Try to get 30 minutes of exercise at least three times per week. Exercise relieves stress and anxiety, which can play a role in your SAD symptoms. Stay involved with your social circle and regular**

**activities. Consider seeing a mental health professional who is trained in cognitive behavior therapy. This treatment is very effective in treating SAD.**

**If you have SAD, the outlook is positive. Treatments are available and those who get the right diagnosis and combination of treatments can find relief from their symptoms. Talk with your healthcare provider to figure out the treatment that will work best for you.**