

CHAMPS

Center for Healthy Aging Ministries, Programs & Services



What is Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD)?

Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD) is a form of depression that occurs annually in a cyclic seasonal fashion. For some individuals this happens during winter, but for others it can be spring and summer.

Seasonal affective disorder is a cyclic, seasonal condition that usually comes back and goes away at the same times every year. The symptoms appear during late fall or early winter and go away during the warmer, sunnier days of spring and summer. But for some people the opposite pattern occurs and they develop seasonal affective disorder with the onset of spring or summer. In either case, problems may start out mild and become more severe as the season progresses.

What are the Symptoms?

Fall /Winter SAD	Spring/Summer SAD	Reverse SAD
Symptoms of winter-onset seasonal affective disorder include:	Symptoms of summer-onset seasonal affective disorder include:	In rare cases, people with seasonal affective disorder don't have depression-like symptoms. Instead, they have symptoms of mania or hypomania, a less intense form of mania, during the summer.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Depression▪ Hopelessness▪ Anxiety▪ Loss of energy▪ Social withdrawal▪ Oversleeping▪ Loss of interest in activities you once enjoyed▪ Appetite changes, especially a craving for foods high in carbohydrates▪ Weight gain▪ Difficulty concentrating and processing information	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Anxiety▪ Insomnia▪ Irritability▪ Agitation▪ Weight loss▪ Poor appetite▪ Increased sex drive	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Persistently elevated mood▪ Increased social activity▪ Hyperactivity▪ Unbridled enthusiasm out of proportion to the situation

Source: Mayo Clinic.com (Sept.24, 2007)

When Should I Seek Help?

Feeling 'down' or having the 'blues' for a few days may be relatively common. However if these 'feelings' persist or are combined with other symptoms listed in the table above—seek medical advice. As with all types of depression medical advice should be sought by individuals experiencing work related or school problems or using drugs or alcohol to cope. Suicidal thoughts should always be addressed immediately with a physician or psychiatrist.

What Types of Therapy are used?

Because of the difference in the intensity or duration of sunlight you are exposed to at different times of the year it is thought that the body's

natural internal clock (circadian rhythms) is disturbed as the seasons change. Therefore you may want to start off with simple measures to

increase your exposure to sunlight--sit close to a window in the bright light or plan more outdoor activities.

If these measures are not adequate, seek medical advice on the use of "light therapy", serotonin (a natural brain chemical that affects mood) or melatonin (a sleep regulating hormone).

The clinical trials done to evaluate light therapy have yielded mixed results—some have found the light therapy ineffective and others showed it to be even more effective than the use of antidepressants. Regardless, light therapy is considered 'standard treatment' for seasonal affective disorder. (However, because of lack of definitive clinical evidence of its effectiveness, it

hasn't been officially approved by the Food and Drug Administration).

A light therapy box does not require a prescription, however its use can produce harmful effects in some individuals therefore it should not be used without medical advice. In persons with bi-polar disorders its use may trigger a state of mania (feelings of euphoria, lack of inhibitions, racing thoughts, and diminished need for sleep, talkativeness, risk taking, and irritability). Moreover, in some individuals with severe depression it has been reported to have triggered suicidal thoughts.

Additionally, depending on the severity of the symptoms and response to therapy, the physician may prescribe an antidepressant, or other type of psychiatric medication and/or psychotherapy.

Ways to Move Forward

Practice the basics of good health:

- exercise regularly (relieves stress and stimulates production of serotonin)
- eat healthy (a balanced diet is a vital key to ones health)
- surround yourself with positive people (positivism is contagious)
- socialize (friends and social activities are vital to feeling fulfilled)
- plan time to relax each day (a hectic schedule may not leave time for adequate rest)
- follow the treatment plan prescribed (take the prescribed treatments and keep follow-up appointment)

-Content of article adapted from: Depression: *Seasonal Affective Disorder* (Sept. 24, 2007). Mayo Clinic.com

Did You Know?

"There are at least three natural mechanisms by which religion might promote mental health: first, through a system of beliefs and mental attitudes; second, through increased social support and promotion of interactions with others; and third, by emphasizing a focus on others and on a power higher than self."

-Source: Koenig, Harold(1997). Is Religion Good for Your Health? The Effects of Religion on Physical and Mental Health. New York: The Haworth Press.



CHAMPS

Center for Healthy Aging, Ministries, Programs & Services
13271 Millard Avenue Omaha, Nebraska 68137
Tel: (402) 895-2224

Website: www.champsonline.info Email: champs@crossandheart.org