

## Summer's Gone, But Don't Get SAD!

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What is it about the cold, winter months that gets people feeling so down? Is it the dead trees and empty flowerbeds? Is it the shorter days and dreary, grey weather? Or is it just the freezing temperatures and biting wind in general? Whatever it is that may cause the winter blues, it is not an uncommon feeling to have once the summer starts to wind down. However, some people are so strongly affected by this overwhelming feeling, that they have an actual medical problem.

Seasonal Affective Disorder, or SAD, is a form of depression that occurs in relation to the seasons, most commonly beginning in the winter (Google Health, 2009). Although a rare form occurs in the summer, the majority of people with SAD start to get their symptoms as soon as the fall season begins. Generally, the disorder makes you feel exhausted and moody, but other symptoms may include decreased concentration and afternoon slumps, carbohydrate cravings, decreased interest in work or other activities, increased appetite and weight gain, increased sleep or excessive daytime sleepiness, lack of energy or sluggish, lethargic movement, and social withdrawal (Google Health, 2009). Some people with SAD also experience anxiety and a sense of hopelessness (CNNhealth.com, 2009).

It's normal to have some days where you're feeling a little down, and many of us do find ourselves getting "cabin fever" or the "winter blahs" during the cold months of the year. If you start to find yourself feeling this way, some easy pick-me-ups include trying to create a brighter and sunnier environment. Open your blinds and sit closer to bright windows at home or at work. Also, try to get outside and soak up as much sun as

possible. Exercising regularly also relieves stress and can lift your mood, in general. (Mayoclinic.com, 2009).

If you find yourself getting depressed for weeks at a time, especially at the same time every year, consider seeing a doctor. Since SAD is a type of depression, antidepressant medications and talk therapy may help. There are also other options, including Light Therapy. This type of treatment involves a special lamp that mimics the outdoor light from the sun, which causes a change to brain chemicals linked to mood (CNNhealth.com, 2009). In the United States, a diagnosis of SAD was first proposed by Norman E. Rosenthal, MD in 1984. Rosenthal wondered why he became sluggish during the winter after moving from sunny South Africa to New York. He started experimenting increasing exposure to artificial light, and found this made a difference (“Seasonal Affective Disorder”, Wikipedia, 2009). Since SAD is a cyclic disorder, meaning that it happens in continuous cycles, many of the symptoms get better by themselves with the change of seasons, (Google Health, 2009).

It is also interesting to look at the SAD studies conducted in various places around the world. An estimated 10% of the population in the Netherlands suffers from SAD. In Alaska it has been established that there is a SAD rate of 8.9%, and around 20% of Irish people are affected by SAD, according to a survey conducted in 2007. The survey also shows that women are more likely to be affected by SAD than men, (“Seasonal Affective Disorder”, Wikipedia, 2009).

If you usually feel like hibernating as soon as your tan starts to fade, you can use your newly acquired information on Seasonal Affective Disorder to help you and your friends beat those winter blues.

Sources:

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