

Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD)

Winter Blues? Cabin fever? Perhaps you are suffering with Seasonal Affective Disorder or SAD which is becoming increasingly more known to people in our society. SAD is a form of depression that typically begins in the winter months for most although there are some instances of summer associated cases. SAD usually appears late in adolescence or early adulthood and is not very common in children or teenagers. It is believed that about 5% of our population is impacted by the disorder on a regular basis and up to 20% may experience a mild form at one time or another. Women are diagnosed with SAD at 4 times the rate of men (Newsday Feb. 16, 2020)

SAD is believed to be caused primarily by a decrease of natural sun light in the winter months. Those who live in northern environments with longer and harsh winters and extended periods of darkness or night time hours are frequently more susceptible.

Science and researchers point to the brain production rates of two specific chemicals; serotonin and melatonin with the presence of SAD. It is well documented that these two neuro-transmitters contribute to the regulation of the sleep cycle, emotions and human energy levels. An increase in melatonin, which is typically produced by the brain during the hours of darkness and contributes to the body's sleep regulation, appears to be causative in some of the symptoms (increased sleep). In addition serotonin levels usually increase with exposure to sunlight therefore it would stand to reason the brain is producing less of the neuro-transmitter in the winter months with an increase in sunless hours contributing to the emergence of depressive symptoms. Other contributing factors may include, body temperature and genetic factors.

Symptoms of SAD include:

Weight gain, moodiness, increased sleeping, social withdrawal/isolation
Loss of interest in typical activities, decreased energy level, increased appetite or cravings especially for carbohydrates, diminished ability to concentrate.

SAD is treatable and most effectively with specific fluorescent light lamps which mimic the presence of natural sunlight. Exercise, psychotherapy long walks during daylight hours, pharmacotherapy and Vitamin D have also been utilized to address the condition.

SAD may also mask or mimic other depressive disorders so it is important to consult your doctor if you recognize any of these symptoms.

For confidential assistance with SAD or other mental health issues call:

LECSA EAP 631-851-1295