Approximately 10 million Americans suffer from Seasonal Affective Disorder, also known as Seasonal Depression

FEELING SAD OR DOWN WHEN COLDER MONTHS COME IN?

IF YOU EXPERIENCE A SHIFT OR CHANGE IN MOOD AND EXPERIENCE SADNESS DURING SHORTER DAYS IN THE WINTER MONTHS

YOU MAY BE SUFFERING FROM SEASONAL AFFECTIVE DISORDER.
What is Seasonal Affective Disorder?

Some people suffer from symptoms of depression during the winter months, with symptoms subsiding during the spring and summer months. These symptoms may be a sign of seasonal affective disorder (SAD).

SAD is a mood disorder associated with depression and related to seasonal variations of light.

SAD affects half a million people every winter between September and April, peaking in December, January, and February.

SAD occurs in both the northern and southern hemispheres, but is extremely rare in those living within 30 degrees latitude of the equator.

The main age of onset of SAD is between 18 and 30 years of age. But the severity depends both on a person’s vulnerability to the disorder and their geographical location.

What are causes of seasonal affective disorder?

Researchers have found many possible contributing factors of Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD).

Our Biological Clock

As sunlight has affected the seasonal activities of animals, such as hibernation, SAD may be an effect of this seasonal light variation in humans. As seasons change, there is a shift in our “biological internal clocks” or circadian rhythm, due partly to these changes in sunlight patterns.

Chemical Factors

Melatonin, a sleep-related hormone secreted by the pineal gland in the brain, has been linked to SAD. This hormone is produced at increased levels in the dark, therefore, when days are shorter melatonin increases.
What are the symptoms of seasonal affective disorder?

A diagnosis of SAD can be made after three consecutive winters of the following symptoms if they are also followed by complete remission of symptoms in the spring and summer months:

**Depression**
- Misery, guilt, loss of self-esteem, hopelessness, despair, and apathy

**Mood Changes**
- Extremes of mood and some periods of mania in spring and summer

**Anxiety**
- Tension and inability to tolerate stress

**Sleep Problems**
- Desire to oversleep and difficulty staying awake or, sometimes, disturbed sleep and early morning waking

**Lethargy**
- Overwhelming feeling of fatigue and an inability to carry out normal routine

**Overeating**
- New or strengthened craving for starchy and sweet foods resulting in weight gain

**Social Problems**
- Sense of irritability and a desire to avoid social contact

**Sexual Problems**
- A loss of libido and decreased interest in physical contact

What are the treatment options for seasonal affective disorder?

**Light Therapy**
Phototherapy or bright light therapy has been shown to suppress the brain’s secretion of melatonin. Although, there have been no research findings linking this therapy to an antidepressant effect, light therapy has been shown to be effective in up to 85 percent of diagnosed cases.

For mild symptoms, spending time outdoors during the day or arranging homes and workplaces to receive more sunlight may be helpful. One study found that an hour’s walk in winter sunlight was as effective as two and a half hours under artificial light.

**Medication**
An antidepressant may prove effective in reducing or eliminating SAD symptoms, but discuss your symptoms thoroughly with your family doctor and/or mental health professional.

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**MHA Georgia's Tips and Tricks to Mental Health Wellness!**

1. **Know Your Triggers and Early Warning Signs of a Manic or Depressive Episode**
2. **Create Your Emergency Action Plan with Contacts, Medications and Preferred Treatment Plan**
3. **Don't Isolate! Join a Support Group or Build New Relationships for Face to Face Connection**
4. **Develop an Active Daily Routine with Healthy Lifestyle Choices**
5. **Keep Stress to a Minimum by using Relaxation Techniques and making Leisure Time a Priority**
6. **Watch what you put in your body by avoiding harmful substances and eating right!**
For Immediate Access to Routine or Crisis Services

Georgia Crisis & Access Line

1-800-715-4225

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