



Seasonal Affective Disorder

Seasonal Affective Disorder, also known as SAD, is characterized by recurring periods of depression that accompany seasonal changes. It usually coincides with the coming of winter, but can also occur with the extreme heat and humidity of summer. Most people with SAD are women who first experience symptoms in their early twenties.

Symptoms of Winter SAD

- Oversleeping
- Daytime fatigue
- Carbohydrate craving
- Weight gain
- Social withdrawal

Winter SAD is related to the decrease in hours of daylight, and cases are more severe in northern locations. Bright white fluorescent light has been shown to reverse the depressive symptoms of SAD. When used for therapy, the lamps are used with a diffusing lens to filter out UV radiation. The photoreceptors in the retina of the eye are believed to facilitate the antidepressant response. 50 – 80% of people using light therapy experience a complete remission of symptoms, although continued treatment is needed throughout the winter season.

What to do if you think you have SAD

If you experience feelings of mild depression that cycle with the seasons, you may try experimenting with the light in your surroundings and schedule more time outdoors. If your depressive symptoms are severe enough to significantly affect your daily life, consult with a mental health professional who is qualified to treat SAD. To help you decide if you need professional treatment, take the self assessment at www.cet.org.

Source: National Alliance on Mental Illness, www.nami.org

For more information on ministering to people with depression disorders contact Marsha Rivas, Equal Access Ministry, Diocese of Toledo, 419-244-6711.

