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Team Tailgate

Seasonal Affective Disorder

As the sun sets earlier in the evening and rises later in the morning in the current and upcoming months, half of a million people in the United States will suffer from (SAD) Seasonal Affective Disorder. Seasonal Affective Disorder is a form of depression that occurs around the same time each year, typically during the fall and winter months, when there is less sunlight. Although it may occur every year, there are several treatments and remedies to help relieve the symptoms and effects of SAD.

Please keep in mind that the following information and resources are intended for people of all ages in all situations.

SAD Overview:

Suicide & Crisis Lifeline | 988lifeline.org | Call 988

Seasonal Affective Disorder typically begins and ends at about the same times every year, starting in the fall and ending in the winter. Although less common, it is possible to experience SAD beginning in the spring and ending in the summer. There are treatments for SAD, which include light therapy, psychotherapy, and medications.

- Three-quarters of sufferers are women compared to men
- Seasonal depression starts in early adulthood but can start as early as childhood or adolescence
- Older adults are less likely to experience SAD
- The illness is commonly seen in people who live in cloudy regions or at high altitudes.

Causes of SAD:

It remains unknown for the causes of Seasonal Affective Disorder, but there are a few factors that may contribute to SAD. It is believed that your biological clock, or circadian rhythm, can contribute to feelings of depression due to the reduced level of sunlight in the fall and winter months. Reduced sunlight can also cause a drop in serotonin, which is a neurotransmitter, or brain chemical, that affects our mood and can cause depression. The change in the season can disrupt the balance of the body's level of melatonin, which plays a role in sleep patterns and mood and can also be a contributor to SAD.

Risk Factors:

- Family history
- Having major depression or bipolar disorder
 - SAD symptoms may worsen seasonally if you have one of these conditions
- Living far from the equator
- Low level of Vitamin D

Symptoms:

Symptoms of Seasonal Affective Disorder may start out mild and become more severe as the season progresses. Signs and symptoms of SAD may include the following:

- Feeling sad or down most of the day or nearly every day
- Inability to concentrate
- Craving carbohydrates, overeating, and weight gain
- Anxiety
- Extreme fatigue and lack of energy
- Irritability
- Difficulty concentrating
- Suicidal thoughts
- Loss of interest in usual activities
- Withdrawn from social activities
- Sleeping too much or not enough

Treatments

There are four types of treatments that may be used alone or in combination to treat Seasonal Affective Disorder: Light therapy, Vitamin D supplements, Psychotherapy, and Medication.

- Light therapy has been a treatment for SAD since the 1980s
 - Light therapy is used to replace the lack of sunshine during the fall and winter months
 - The symptoms of SAD may be relieved by sitting in front of a light box first thing in the morning, daily from early fall to spring
- Vitamin D supplements
 - Some suggest that a mixture of vitamin D and other treatments may help with SAD.
- Psychotherapy using cognitive behavior therapy
 - Basic techniques such as identifying negative thoughts and replacing them with positive thoughts
 - A behavior activation technique helps the individual identify activities that are engaging and pleasurable to improve coping with winter.
- Medication
 - A serotonin inhibitor is often used as a medication to avoid the risk of serotonin chemicals, the happy chemical, from lowering.
 - Other antidepressants may also be used to help the individual from further depression.

You are not alone!

Although the fall and winter months are upon us, SAD does not have to take over anyone's life. If you are experiencing any symptoms of SAD, it might help to talk to those you love or your healthcare provider. Be on the lookout to find out what helps you if you are feeling the effects of the winter blues or seasonal affective disorder this fall and winter.