

## January 2008 Health Feature

### “Winter Blues”

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As the winter months proceed we notice that the days slowly become shorter and the drive to work is a whole lot brighter than the ride home. Often times this yearly process brings a depressive state and mood changes to many individuals in the United States. These changes can be attributed to a condition called SAD. SAD stands for Seasonal Affect Disorder also known as Seasonal Depression or Winter Blues. It usually begins during the fall, carries on into the winter and ends during the spring or early summer. The disorder is attributed to a chemical imbalance in the brain due to the lack of sunlight an individual gets during winter months in which the days are much shorter compared to summer months.

#### **SAD Symptoms:**

- Weight gain
- Fatigue
- Decreased levels in energy
- Change in appetite
- Difficulty concentrating
- Change in sleeping habits
- Increased desire to be alone
- Avoidance of social situations

#### **Treatments:**

- 1). Sunlight Therapy: there are specially made lights usually attached to a visor or hat that one wears for a timed period each day to help treat the disorder. Some side effects include eye strains, headaches, and irritability. Tanning beds should not be used as a form of light therapy.
- 2). Antidepressant Medication: medication can be taken to treat the depressive symptoms. The FDA (Food & Drug Administration) approved the first drug to treat SAD in June 2006. Wellbutrin XL can be used to treat individuals with seasonal affect disorder when prescribed by a physician. (<[http://www.fda.gov/bbs/topics/NEWS/2006/NEW01388/html](http://www.fda.gov/bbs/topics/NEWS/2006/NEW01388.html)>)
- 3). A Combination of the light therapy and drug treatment can be effective.
- 4). Change your scenery! Go outside, take a vacation to somewhere sunny, or in extreme cases consider living in an environment in which the longer days do not change as drastically.

### SAD Statistics:

- SAD is more common in women than in men
- It usually does not effect individuals under the age of twenty
- More than half a million people in the United States suffer from SAD per year
- As individuals age they are less likely to experience SAD

If you experience any of the symptoms characterized by Seasonal Affect Disorder and have noticed they come on a lot stronger during the winter months, contact your physician and talk to him or her about the disorder. There is a variety of treatment options spanning from environment change to drug therapy and research has shown great success in the various treatments. You are not alone; SAD is a common disorder and affects half a million Americans per year. If you think that you may suffer from these symptoms of Seasonal Affect Disorder, contact the Employee Assistance Program at 335-2085 or your primary care provider.

#### Sources:

Preidt, Robert. "As Sunlight Fades, look out for SAD" Health day: Medline Plus. October 6, 2006. [http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/print/news/fullstory\\_55813.html](http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/print/news/fullstory_55813.html)

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