

Treatment Continued...

Increased exposure to sunlight can improve symptoms of SAD:

- ◆ Exercise on a regular basis, preferably outdoors, or if indoors, be near a window or bright light. Consider taking a long walk outside.
- ◆ Get as much natural light as possible, which might include: allowing light to shine through your bedroom windows and doors; sitting in front of a south facing window for short but frequent periods during the day; rearranging work spaces to be near a window; sitting next to windows in classrooms and restaurants; and arranging social outings to be outdoors
- ◆ Install bright light bulbs
- ◆ Put your lights on a timer in the bedroom to switch on 1/2 an hour before awakening
- ◆ Maintain the same daily pattern of awakening and going to sleep
- ◆ Dress to conserve energy and warmth and manage time wisely. Avoid or minimize stress. Keep life simple.
- ◆ When possible, postpone making life changes until spring or summer.
- ◆ If you are able, arrange a winter vacation to a warm and sunny climate

CU Healthy

HCS wants to CU Healthy! The Health Promotion Team at HCS tries to achieve this through our:

- Resource Centre
- Student Peer Interns
- Health Promotion Advisory Committee
- Website (carleton.ca/health)
- Facebook page
- Newsletters, class presentations, workshops and more . . .

The Health Promotion Team promotes healthy lifestyles and wellness and can provide you with information about stress, colds, nutrition, sexuality, alcohol, etc. Contact the Resource Centre for more information at 613-520-2600 ext. 6544 or cu_healthy@carleton.ca.



2600 CTTC Building
613-520-6674
carleton.ca/health

Seasonal Affective Disorder



613-520-6674

carleton.ca/health

2600 CTTC Building

What is Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD)?

During the fall and winter months, some people suffer from symptoms of depression that can appear gradually or come on all at once. These symptoms often dissipate as spring arrives and stay in remission through the summer months. For some people, this is a sign that they suffer from SAD.

What are the symptoms of SAD?

Symptoms of SAD usually appear during the colder months of fall and winter, when there is less exposure to sunlight during the day. Depression symptoms can be mild to moderate, but they can become severe.

Those who work or study long hours inside buildings with few windows may experience symptoms all year, and some individuals may note changes in mood during long cold stretches of cloudy weather.

Symptoms can include but are not limited to:

- ◆ Fatigue and lack of interest in normal activities
- ◆ Social withdrawal
- ◆ Craving foods high in carbohydrates and weight gain

How does SAD Develop?

- ◆ SAD has been linked to a biochemical imbalance in the brain prompted by shorter daylight hours and a lack of sunlight in winter. Just as sunlight affects the seasonal activities of animals, SAD may be an effect of this seasonal light variation in humans. As seasons change, people experience a shift in their biological internal clock or circadian rhythm that can cause them to be out of step with their daily schedule.
- ◆ Melatonin, a sleep-related hormone, also has been associated with SAD. This hormone, which has been linked to depression, is produced at increased levels in the dark. When days are shorter and darker, more melatonin is produced.
- ◆ Some evidence suggests that the farther someone lives from the equator, the more likely they are to develop SAD. For example, approximately 25% of the population at the middle-to-northern latitudes of the U.S. experience winter doldrums, a sub-clinical level of SAD. These people notice the return of SAD-like symptoms each winter, but remain fully functional. The most difficult months for SAD sufferers seem to be January and February.
- ◆ Younger adults and women are thought to be at higher risk for developing symptoms. The main age of onset is between 18 and 30.

Who is at risk for SAD?

The first year of university is full of changes that may contribute to developing SAD:

- ◆ The physical move to university that may involve a change of climate or latitude
- ◆ A student's ability to cope may be compromised by increased stress and the demands of university
- ◆ Self-discipline is more important because parents and family are not there to insure that a student gets to class and/or completes assignments
- ◆ Lack of early morning sunlight, i.e. staying in a dark room instead of walking to an early morning class

How is SAD treated?

If your depressive symptoms are severe enough to significantly affect your daily living, light therapy (phototherapy) has proven an effective treatment option. This form of therapy involves exposure to very bright light (usually from a special florescent lamp) between 30 and 90 minutes a day during the winter months. These light-therapy sessions are best used during the morning hours. Lights can be purchased at Shoppers or Costco. Additional relief has been found with psychotherapy sessions or antidepressants.

The CU HealthyProgram gratefully acknowledges The American Psychiatric Association (APA) as a resource for the information in this brochure