

SEASONAL AFFECTIVE DISORDER (S.A.D)

**For many of us, the winter months can seem never-ending and bleak.
How can you tell if it's more serious than just a case of the winter blues?**

What Is Seasonal Affective Disorder?

Seasonal Affective Disorder, or **S.A.D.**, generally occurs in the fall and continues throughout the winter season. Less commonly, S.A.D. can occur in a rare form of "summer depression", which begins in late spring or at the beginning of summer, and lasts until fall.

Symptoms of S.A.D include-

- depression
- increased negativity about the future,
- a loss of energy
- disrupted sleeping patterns
- difficulty functioning
- inability to concentrate
- increased appetite and/or weight gain
- irritability and moodiness
- a decreased sex drive
- social withdrawal.



For children and teens with S.A.D., symptoms include feeling tired or irritable, making vague complaints about physical symptoms, temper tantrums, and specific cravings for junk food.

According to diagnostic criteria, S.A.D. is most common among young people, with women making up this majority at 60%-90%.

What Causes S.A.D.?

Some researchers believe that the disorder is caused by a change in the hormone secretion within the brain during different times in the year. Reduced exposure to sunlight causes a drop in the release of serotonin, the neurotransmitter which provides a relaxing, comforting effect.

Another theory relates to the hormone melatonin, which causes lethargy. When your retina is exposed to light, a progression decreases the release of serotonin. The amount of light a retina is exposed to modifies the amount of melatonin that is released into the nervous system and boosts serotonin in the brain-- creating an anti-depressant effect.

How Can You Handle S.A.D.?

There are a number of ways you can handle or even prevent the effects of S.A.D.

- **Try to spend time outside.** Even when it is cloudy, the effects of daylight are still advantageous.
- **Make sure to eat a balanced diet.** Your diet should include vitamins and minerals to help curb those carb cravings.
- **Try to get at least 30 minutes of exercise three or more times a week.** Consider exercising outside instead of inside. Even a brisk walk has beneficial effects.
- **Make sure you stay active and involved in your regular routines.**
- **Do not isolate yourself and stay active within your social groups.**
- **Consider scheduling your holidays to a sunny destination during the winter months.**
- **Do not to diagnose yourself.** Always seek the advice of your doctor.

To determine if you have S.A.D., your doctor will likely check your symptoms, give a physical exam, and may possibly order blood tests to rule out any other medical conditions.

Let There Be Light!

Light therapy can be an alternative to anti-depressants for people who suffer from S.A.D. The therapy uses exposure to light (brighter than indoor lights, but less bright than direct sunlight) to replace lost exposure to daylight.

If you are trying light therapy, remember not to use tanning lamps or heat lamps, as they may have damaging effects. The best time to use light exposure is first thing in the morning after you wake up. For some, light therapy is a great way to deal with the effects of S.A.D. Talk to your doctor to find out what is best for you.



**If you think you may be suffering from S.A.D,
talk to your doctor or EFAP counsellor.**

YOUR LOGO HERE

**For confidential assistance
Brown Crawshaw 1.800.668.2055**

www.browncrawshaw.com