



SEASONAL AFFECTIVE DISORDER “Winter Blues”

Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD) is a serious, but treatable, form of depression which most often first manifests in individuals who are 20-30 years of age. It is caused by the loss of light during winter months. Those who have moved from sunnier climates to New Jersey are more at risk, but many who have grown up with four seasons also develop SAD.

The symptoms of SAD usually recur regularly each winter, starting between September and November and continuing until March or April. A definitive diagnosis is made after several consecutive winters of *symptoms such as:*

Depression

- Low mood, worse than and different from normal sadness
- Negative thoughts and feelings
- Guilt and loss of self-esteem
- Sometimes hopelessness and despair
- Sometimes apathy and inability to feel

Sleep Problems

- The need to sleep more
- A tendency to oversleep
- Restless or disturbed sleep
- Very early morning waking
- Difficulty staying awake during the day

Lethargy

- Fatigue, often incapacitating, making normal routines difficult

Anxiety

- Tension
- Stress is harder to deal with

Over Eating

- Craving for carbohydrates and sweet foods leading to an increase in weight

Physical Health

- Weakened immune system
More vulnerable to illness

Cognitive Function

- Concentration and memory impairment
- Brain does not work as well or quickly
- Difficulty concentrating

Social Problems

- Irritability
- Finding it harder to be with people
- Less interest in sex and physical contact

Sudden Mood Changes in Spring

- Possible agitation and restlessness and/or a short period of hypomania (over activity)
- No dramatic mood change but a gradual loss of winter symptoms

If you are feeling SAD this winter, please seek help.
Counseling and medication can make all the difference.

Information taken from www.sada.org.uk; the official website of the Seasonal Affective Disorder Association

Office of Student Counseling
Scheide Hall, 8:30-4:30, Monday – Friday
nancy.schongalla@ptsem.edu