

Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD)

Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD), also known as Depression with Seasonal Pattern, is a depression that is dependent on seasonal changes. While it usually appears in the fall and continues throughout winter, it is not limited to just colder seasons.

Occurrence and Prevalence

It is estimated that approximately 2-3% of Canadians will experience SAD in their lifetime and an additional 15% will experience a less severe form of SAD. Although 3 out of 4 people with SAD are women, men experience more severe symptoms. Adults are more likely to experience SAD than teens and children.

Symptoms

Individuals with SAD may experience the following:

Symptoms of depression

Sad feeling that persists and impacts aspects of life such as work, school, or relationships

Lower energy levels than usual

Feelings of tiredness, irritability, and lethargy

Change in appetite

Cravings for carbohydrate rich food which may lead to weight gain

Loss of interest

Withdrawal from activities previously enjoyed which may lead to inactive lifestyle. Distancing from family and friends may also occur.

Treatments that Work

Psychotherapy - Most commonly Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT). Counselling and Psychodynamic therapies are also useful. This treatment can reduce the severity of the depression.

Other methods - Exposure to natural light and light therapy (a bright artificial light that can be used at home or in the workplace). This therapy involves being exposed to bright light in the mornings.

Medication - Talk to your doctor about the right medication for you to treat SAD.

Self-help - Exercising regularly, having a healthy diet, maintaining regular sleeping habits, and spending more time outdoors have all been demonstrated to make a real difference.

Resources

[Tips to ease winter SAD symptoms](#), CMHA BC

Canadian Psychological Association “Psychology Works” Fact Sheet: [Seasonal Affective Disorder](#)

Canadian Mental Health Association [Seasonal Affective Disorder](#).