



ARE YOU FEELING THE EFFECTS OF “SAD”?

Wintertime presents us with a variety of obstacles, including holiday and heating bills, treacherous roads, and cookie-induced weight gain, but for some people it can also have a serious impact on mood. Seasonal Depression, also known as Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD), is a relatively common mental disorder that can negatively affect motivation, sociability, and concentration, as well as lead to increased sleep, irritability, and weight gain. SAD is more common at higher latitudes (like Wisconsin) where there is a greater shift in daylight levels from summer to winter. Essentially, our bodies have difficulty coping with the sharp decrease in daylight during the wintertime, and “act out” by showing symptoms of depression. Light isn’t the only factor, however. The brain is constantly making chemicals that help the body operate, including serotonin, norepinephrine, and dopamine that affect mood. As it gets colder and the days become shorter, we naturally tend to become less active and this can trigger or exacerbate a seasonal depression because fewer chemicals are being produced. We’re all guilty of driving when we should walk, or waiting to take the garbage out until it stops snowing, but over time the change in activity levels from summer to winter can deprive the brain of all those “happy” chemicals that it needs to keep us functioning at a high level.

Staying active and getting exposure to sunlight can help ward off SAD, so it’s important to be proactive if you think you might be at risk. Recognize how your behaviors change in the winter and take steps to counteract this change by substituting new behaviors. For example, if you used to do a lot of boating and running in the warm months, maybe try snowmobiling and snowshoeing in the winter. Also try to be outside as much as possible on the rare sunny winter days, install bright, daylight-spectrum light bulbs in your house, and try to let as much light through the windows as possible. It might be helpful to buy a warmer winter coat, hat or boots so it’s not as unpleasant to be outside. If this isn’t enough, there are several formal treatment options for SAD, including Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT), medication, or light therapy. Every person is different, but an EAP counselor can help you pick the treatment that is right for you. For more information about SAD, including an excellent description of light therapy, please click the following link:

[http://www.nami.org/Content/ContentGroups/HelpLine1/Seasonal_Affective_Disorder_\(SAD\).htm](http://www.nami.org/Content/ContentGroups/HelpLine1/Seasonal_Affective_Disorder_(SAD).htm)

If you are experiencing symptoms of seasonal depression, the EAP can help. Call for an appointment: 1-800-222-8590.

