

Pulse!

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Special points of interest:

- SAD is more common in women than men, but men typically display the most severe symptoms. 60-90% of sufferers of SAD are women.
- There is no specific diagnostic test for SAD; it is diagnosed through a patient's history of seasonal depressive episodes.
- SAD has been observed to run in families, meaning that there is likely a genetic aspect to its appearance.
- Researchers believe that the effect SAD has on the brain are a result of a lack of exposure to light.
- Other factors such as low vitamin D levels in the blood are also associated with SAD.



Helping Children Escape the Winter Blues!

By: Jean Zitter, MSW, LCSW

What is Seasonal Affective Disorder?

Seasonal Affective Disorder is a type of depression that tends to show up in the fall and winter when there are fewer hours of daylight, then lifts in the spring as sunlight returns. It's sometimes easy for parents to overlook symptoms of SAD, or dismiss them as normal mood swings. Aside from feeling

sad or depressed, your child may be irritable, feel tired, have difficulty concentrating, experience changes in school performance, or have decreased interest in things he usually enjoys. But even if your child is showing a few of these symptoms, it doesn't necessarily mean he has SAD. It's not uncommon for people to want to stay in during the winter or to feel more tired. The timeframe and severity of symptoms are

the biggest telltale signs that your child is experiencing more than the normal winter blahs. If symptoms persist for two weeks, or they're so severe your child is having difficulty functioning, contact your pediatrician or a licensed mental health professional who has expertise working with children.



Prevention and Treatment

There's no known way to avoid SAD, but practicing general healthy habits may be helpful. Unfortunately, there isn't a lot of research about treating SAD in children. The same healthy habits that may help prevent the disorder may treat very mild cases. That means having your child spend time outside during daylight hours, making sure she

gets at least an hour of exercise every day, offering her healthy foods, like fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and lean protein, and encouraging her to get enough sleep. Others may require medication, such as antidepressants, and/or psychotherapy to help your child express his feelings and learn coping strategies to use when

he is stressed, or a combination of these options.

Literature suggests the following may provide some relief, but first consult with your primary care specialist, or pediatrician for children.

10 Potential Ways to Ease Seasonal Sadness



1. Try Light from a Box: Light Therapy boxes give off light that mimic sunshine and can help in recovery from seasonal affective disorder.

2. Use a Dawn Simulator: Dawn Simulators can help some people with seasonal sadness. These devices are alarm clocks but rather than waking you abruptly with loud sounds, they produce light that gradually increases in intensity like the sun.



3. Talk with your Doctor: Seasonal Affective Disorder is best diagnosed by talking with a mental health professional, and your doctor can provide appropriate recommendations for your child such as medication, herbal supplements, or vitamins.



4. Add Aromatherapy: The essential oils can influence the area of the brain that's responsible for controlling moods and the body's internal clock that influences sleep and appetite. Check with your doctor or a specialist for essential oils that are safe for children.

5. Get Moving: As it does with other forms of depression and sadness, exercise can help alleviate the seasonal affective disorder too. Outdoor exercise is most helpful.

6. Let the Sunshine in: If you have wintertime blues you'll want to get outside as much as you can during the day and take advantage of what sunlight there is.

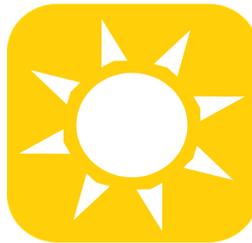
7. Stick to a Schedule: People who live with SAD often have trouble sleeping at night and getting up in the morning. Maintaining a regular schedule improves sleep which can help alleviate symptoms of seasonal sadness.

8. Good snacking choices include popcorn, pretzels, shredded wheat squares or low-fat biscotti. When it comes to meals, it is recommended to make dinner your main carbohydrate-containing meal. That's because evening is usually the time when the symptoms of SAD are at their strongest—and so is the urge gorge on cookies. Eating healthier carbs,

like lentils, brown rice and potatoes, may help fight that urge.

9. Keep a Journal: Writing down your thoughts can have a positive effect on your mood. It can help you get some of your negative feelings out of your system.

10. Get involved in recreational activities: Participating in a sport, leisure activity, or club can help children with the winter blues, and can provide a break from your daily routines. If your child does not participate in organized activities, playing outside each day in your yard or taking a walk each day can also provide a much needed break.



Upcoming Events:

January 18:

Shortened Day for Students

January 21st

Martin Luther King, Jr. Day

Next Issue
February 4, 2019