

# Winter Wellness: Understanding and Overcoming Seasonal Affective Disorder

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Are you feeling utterly exhausted and seeking solace in unhealthy snacks? Is it a struggle to get out of bed in the morning? If you've experienced these symptoms during the fall and winter months, only to see them vanish with the arrival of spring and summer, you might have Seasonal affective disorder. Its symptoms vary from mild to debilitating, frequently taking individuals by surprise. Let's look at the nuances of SAD, its symptoms, causes, and effective treatments to help you embrace the changing seasons with a brighter outlook.

## Understanding Seasonal Affective Disorder

Seasonal Affective Disorder, classified as a mood disorder, typically strikes during the colder months of fall and winter, only to dissipate with the arrival of spring and summer. Most people who experience SAD have normal moods throughout the rest of the year. For some, the onset of symptoms is sudden and bewildering, while others notice a gradual decline in their mental well-being.

## The Symptoms of SAD

The symptoms of Seasonal Affective Disorder can manifest differently in each person, but common signs include:

### Sadness and Depressed Mood:

Individuals experience a prevailing sense of sadness and maintain a persistently low mood.

### **Fatigue and Lethargy:**

Persistently low energy levels accompany an overwhelming feeling of fatigue.

### **Loss of Interest:**

Individuals show diminished interest in activities that once brought joy and satisfaction.

### **Carbohydrate Cravings:**

An unusual carbohydrate craving often leads to weight gain.

### **Social Isolation:**

SAD creates a desire to withdraw from social interactions which leads to self-imposed isolation.

### **Weight Gain:**

Individuals may experience increased body weight due to overeating, mainly carbohydrates.

### **Decreased Sexual Interest:**

There is a decline in sexual interest and desire.

### **Hopelessness:**

Individuals grapple with an overwhelming sense of hopelessness about the future.

In severe cases, SAD may lead to suicidal thoughts, requiring immediate attention. It's crucial to recognize that the symptoms of SAD can range from mild to extreme, impacting individuals differently.

## Where Does SAD Come From?

Studies propose a close correlation between Seasonal Affective Disorder and diminished sunlight exposure in the autumn and winter months. This diminished sunlight affects brain chemistry and disrupts an individual's circadian rhythms, throwing them out of sync with their daily routines. The most challenging months for SAD sufferers are typically January and February. Furthermore, genetic predispositions may make some individuals more prone to developing Seasonal Affective Disorder than others. This genetic susceptibility, combined with environmental factors, can increase the likelihood of experiencing SAD.

## Treating Seasonal Affective Disorder

If you think you may experience this kind of depression in the fall and winter, it's essential to seek an accurate diagnosis and explore effective treatments to manage your symptoms. Here are some strategies that can help alleviate the impact of SAD:

### Increase Sunlight Exposure:

Maximizing your exposure to natural sunlight is a fundamental strategy in combating SAD. Consider taking daily one-hour walks outdoors and arranging your home or office to allow sunlight in. For those who struggle to wake up in the morning, a bedroom light on a timer can simulate a natural sunrise.

### Light Therapy:

Check with your healthcare professional about light therapy. There are a number of light therapy devices available that others have found helpful. This therapy can help regulate your circadian rhythms and improve your mood.

## Psychotherapy:

Cognitive therapy, in particular, can be highly effective in addressing SAD. It helps challenge negative thought patterns associated with depression, such as feeling that you've always been this way, deserve to feel this way, or will always feel this way. Recognize that SAD is an actual illness, and your symptoms are seasonal, not permanent.

## Medication:

In some cases, antidepressant medications, especially Selective Serotonin Reuptake Inhibitors (SSRIs), may be prescribed by a healthcare professional to manage SAD symptoms.

## Lifestyle Changes:

Prioritize daily exercise and a balanced diet to support overall well-being. Proactive problem-solving, such as planning for lower energy levels, can help reduce stress and manage SAD symptoms effectively.

Seasonal Affective Disorder is a challenging condition affecting many individuals during fall and winter. Seeking help upon recognizing the symptoms is crucial to managing and mitigating its impact on your life. Whether through increased exposure to sunlight, light therapy, psychotherapy, medication, or lifestyle changes, there are numerous strategies to combat SAD effectively.

