

# ***FEAP NEWSLETTER***

*A Series of Educational Articles from your Faculty and Employee Assistance Program*

Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD) is different from the winter blahs. Many people tend to overeat, sleep more and get cabin fever during the winter months. SAD goes beyond these feelings and symptoms. SAD is a type of depressive disorder. That tends to occur in the months of the year with the least amount of daylight.

## **Who Gets SAD?**

- ❑ 25% of population has at least mild form of SAD
- ❑ 5% experience a more severe form
- ❑ 75% of sufferers are women
- ❑ Usually begins with those in their twenties
- ❑ 55% of those diagnosed with SAD report having at least one close relative with a psychiatric condition, usually depression
- ❑ 34% report close relative with an alcohol/drug problem
- ❑ Location of residence – people in northern most areas most likely to experience SADS

## **Signs & Symptoms**

SAD is a cyclic, seasonal condition. The signs and symptoms of SAD usually appear only during the winter months. You are free of these symptoms during spring and summer. If you have been through two annual cycles with the following signs and symptoms during the winter, you may have SAD:

- ❑ Depression
- ❑ Loss of Energy
- ❑ Irritability

- ❑ Headaches
- ❑ Increased sleep
- ❑ Loss of interest in sex
- ❑ Overeating, especially foods high in carbohydrates
- ❑ Weight gain

## **What Are the Causes?**

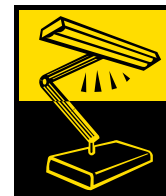
The exact causes of SAD are not entirely known. Some researchers think that a biochemical shift occurs with reduced amounts of sunlight, which triggers depression. Other experts have looked into connections between sunlight and the body's circadian rhythms as a cause. Heredity may play a role, as well as the amount of stress a person is under.

## **Coping With SAD?**

There are a variety of methods that help cope with SAD:

### 1. Light Therapy

- ❑ Light box – use of a special lamp that is 10-20 times brighter than ordinary indoor light for about 30 minutes each morning.



- ❑ Direct Sunlight – walk outside in sunlight as much as possible.

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## **When to Seek Help**

If you experience feelings of depression that seem more intense than “the blues”, notice a pattern of depression that worsens during the winter or have any thoughts about suicide, you should contact the EAP, another mental health professional or your physician.

The Employee Assistance program can help. It’s just a phone call away.

### 2. Exercise



### 3. Diet

4. Medication – at times antidepressant medications are used to treat SAD.



5. Talk Therapy – counseling is often a useful strategy to cope with SAD. Therapy helps identify and modify negative thoughts and behaviors that affect mood.



6. Stress Management – reducing and managing the stress in your life, meditation, relaxation and breathing exercises are all beneficial ways to copy with SAD.

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