

SEASONAL AFFECTIVE DISORDER

Seasonal affective disorder (SAD) is a type of depression that's related to changes in seasons—SAD begins and ends at about the same times every year. If you're like most people with SAD your symptoms start in the fall and continue through the winter months. Seasonal affective disorder is not considered a separate mood disorder; rather, SAD is a subtype of depressive disorder. Winter depression is by definition a recurrent illness and maintenance treatment may be indicated to prevent recurrences.

Symptoms

Symptoms vary but include:

- Sad, anxious or "empty" feelings
- Irritability, restlessness
- Tiredness, fatigue, low energy
- Problems getting along with others
- Difficulty concentrating
- Appetite changes, especially craving foods high in carbohydrates
- Feeling of hopelessness, pessimism or worthlessness
- Having low energy and losing interest in activities you once enjoyed
- Difficulty sleeping or oversleeping

Treatment

Recognizing seasonal affective disorder is important because it is common and associated with psychosocial impairment. Treatment for seasonal affective disorder may include light therapy, medication and psychotherapy.

Light therapy: involves sitting a few feet from a special light therapy box (that mimics natural outdoor light) so that you are exposed to bright light. Light therapy is one of the first line treatments for fall onset SAD. Research is limited, but it appears to be effective for some people in relieving SAD symptoms.

Medication: Some people benefit from antidepressant treatment especially if symptoms are severe.

Psychotherapy: This can help you identify and change negative thoughts and behaviors that may be making you feel worse, learn ways to cope with SAD, and learn how to manage stress.

In addition, patients may benefit from incorporating the following throughout their entire course of acute and maintenance treatment:

- Practice sleep hygiene
- Daily walks outside, even on cloudy days
- Aerobic exercise
- Enhanced indoor lighting with regular lamps and fixtures
- Awaken from sleep with light, using a timer to turn a light on in the bedroom

If you think you may have SAD or symptoms of depression, call the Student Health Center (503-352-2269) to discuss treatment and medication options. For therapy services, call the Student Counseling Center (502-352-2191).