



Junior Officer Advisory Group

Readiness & Deployment Committee

[Behavioral Health Team]

Practicing Wellness

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Sad or Seasonal Affective Disorder (S.A.D)?

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Have you ever experienced a change in mood with the transition of seasons and thought it was just the “Winter Blues”? Seasonal Affective Disorder (S.A.D) is classified as a recurrent type of depression correlated to the change in seasons. This change more commonly occurs at the beginning of the fall months through the winter season but can also occur in the spring and summer months.

Physiological causes of Seasonal Affective Disorder include an overproduction of melatonin, coupled with decreased serotonin levels impacting the body’s natural circadian rhythm, increasing the difficulty of the body to adjust to seasonal changes (Melrose, 2015). Seasonal changes, including decreased exposure to sunlight with longer, darker days, contribute to the changes experienced by S.A.D.

Nearly 10 million Americans are affected by Seasonal Affective Disorder, with 10-20% exhibiting mild symptoms (Psychology Today, 2019). Risk factors of S.A.D include having a personal or family history of depression or bipolar disorder and living further from the Equator. S.A.D more commonly impacts those ages 18-35, with women four times more likely to be affected. Common symptoms of S.A.D include mood changes like feelings of worthlessness, decreased energy and concentration, social withdrawal, agitation, difficulty sleeping or hypersomnia, and changes in eating habits, including overeating and weight gain.

Treatment for S.A.D can include one or a combination of anti-depressant medications, light therapy, psychotherapy, and supplemental vitamins, like Vitamin D (National Institute of Mental Health, n.d.). As the seasons change, be intentional and mindful of your body’s physiological changes and whether daily routines are affected. Seeking professional consultation is critical in diagnosing and treating Seasonal Affective Disorder.

References: Melrose S. (2015). Seasonal Affective Disorder: An Overview of Assessment and Treatment Approaches. *Depression research and treatment*, 2015, 178564. <https://doi.org/10.1155/2015/178564>
National Institute of Mental Health. (n.d). Seasonal Affective Disorder. Publication No. 20-MH-8138. <https://www.nimh.nih.gov/sites/default/files/documents/health/publications/seasonal-affective-disorder/20-mh-8138-sad.pdf>

Psychology Today (2019). Seasonal Affective Disorder.

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/conditions/seasonal-affective-disorder>