

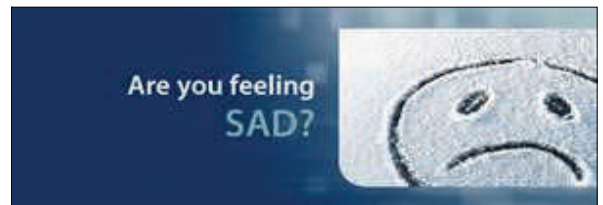
Seasonal Affective Disorder

Not looking forward to winter? Symptoms of winter depression or seasonal affective disorder (SAD) usually begin in October or November and lasts into March or April, with most individuals feeling fully back to normal in early May.

One area of focus of the Disability Health project is to promote mental health wellness to ND citizens with disabilities. ND Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS) data shows that among responses reflecting poor mental health for ages 18-64, 17.3% of individuals with disabilities and 6.0% of individuals without disabilities indicated they experienced 15-30 days of poor mental health in the month. Individuals age 65 and over showed similar results.

What is seasonal affective disorder?

Seasonal affective disorder is a type of depression that occurs at the same time every year. Most often symptoms start in fall and continue through the winter months, when individuals react to decreasing amounts of sunlight and colder temperatures.



Symptoms for fall and winter seasonal affective disorder

- Depression
- Anxiety and irritability
- Loss of energy
- Social withdrawal
- Oversleeping
- Loss of interest in activities you once enjoyed
- Appetite changes, craving foods high in carbohydrates such as sweets
- Weight gain
- Difficulty concentrating
- Symptoms that occur with general depression such as hopelessness, guilt, and physical problems (e.g., headaches)

Causes

- Upsetting the body's internal clock with reduced levels of sunlight may lead to feeling depressed.
- Reduced sunlight can cause a decrease in the brain's serotonin level that may trigger depression.
- Melatonin, a natural hormone produced by the body, has a role in sleep patterns and moods; the changing seasons can disrupt the balance of this hormone level.

Treatment

- Light Therapy or phototherapy mimics outdoor light. The specialized light therapy box exposes the individual to bright light.
- Medications. Some people with SAD benefit from treatment with an antidepressant medication.
- Psychotherapy. Even though SAD is thought to be related to brain chemistry, mood and behavior can add to the symptoms. Psychotherapy can help to identify and change negative thoughts and behaviors to better manage stress.



Other things to consider

- Make your home environment sunnier and brighter.
- Get outside for walks during daylight hours, even on cold and cloudy days.
- Physical exercise helps relieve stress and anxiety, regular exercise may lift your mood.

Always consult your physician or primary care provider before starting any kind of treatment for seasonal affective disorder.

Sources:

- *Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD)*. Mayo Clinic. <http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/seasonal-affective-disorder/>
- *Seasonal Affective Disorder*. National Alliance on Mental Illness. <http://www.nami.org/>

The ND Disability Health Project can provide technical assistance to assist with health promotion, staff training and education, and disability awareness. Contact us at 800.233.1737 or visit our website at

www.ndcpd.org/health



North Dakota
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Vision:

All people in ND have access to information and services they need to maintain good health and wellness. There are no health disparities between people with and without disabilities that are based solely on the presence of a disability.

Pay It Forward.....

Pass this information on to others who may find it helpful.