

## Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD)

Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD) is literally the "Winter Blues". Caused by a biochemical imbalance in the hypothalamus due to the shortening of daylight hours and the lack of sunlight in winter, seasonal depression can become a serious, disabling illness. Those who do not suffer from SAD may not understand its effect on an individual. SAD affects an estimated 14% of the American population and can severely hinder one's ability to function on a daily basis. SAD is a serious condition that often requires medical support.

### SYMPTOMS

The symptoms of seasonal depression usually recur regularly each winter, typically starting sometime between September and November and continuing until March or April. Each individual is different. Treatment needs to be catered to the individual's needs.

*Sleep problems:* Usually a desire to oversleep and difficulty staying awake but, in some cases, disturbed sleep and early morning waking.

*Lethargy:* Feeling of fatigue and inability to carry out normal routine.

*Overeating:* Craving for carbohydrates and sweet foods, usually resulting in weight gain.

*Depression:* Feelings of misery, guilt and loss of self-esteem, sometimes hopelessness and despair, sometimes apathy and loss of feelings.

*Social Problems:* Irritability and desire to avoid social contact.

*Anxiety:* Tension and inability to tolerate stress.

*Mood changes:* Short periods of extreme mood changes.

*Weakened immune:* Increased vulnerability to infection and other illnesses.

*Loss of libido:* Decreased interest in sex and physical contact.

### EASING THE IMPACT OF SAD

*Ways to help a friend (or yourself) survive the winter months:*

- Surprise your friend with some bright, cheery flowers such as tulips, hyacinths, or daffodils.
- Create a "care package" with spring delicacies. Include spring fruit such as strawberries and blueberries, some hot new sunglasses, and chocolate.
- Throw an indoor beach-party and picnic.
- Commit to meeting with a friend for a daily morning walk. Just 20 minutes in the sunlight and fresh air can boost serotonin levels in the brain and help shake off winter "brain fog."
- Talk with your friends about the winter blues. Sometimes all we need is a good friend to brighten our spirits and help us get through these winter months.

### LIGHT-BOX THERAPY AT UCC

The University Counseling Center (UCC) owns a light-box that is available for student use. Students do NOT need to be in regular therapy at UCC in order to use the lamp. The best time to use the lamp is in the morning for approximately one hour, consistently throughout the week. Students are free to read or do other work while under the lamp.

### SCHEDULING AN APPOINTMENT

Call 275-2662 to schedule an appointment at the University Health Service (UHS). UHS offers a full range of services. All visits to UHS are confidential.

Contact UCC to make an appointment to use the light-box at 275-3113 (Towne House) or 275-2361 (Dewey Hall) or to schedule an appointment. Visits to UCC are confidential.

### LINKS

Seasonal Affective Disorder Association  
<http://www.sada.org.uk>

Light Box Therapy information and supplies  
<http://www.sunbox.com>

Northern Light Technologies  
<http://www.northernlighttechnologies.com>