

SAD: More Than a Case of the Winter Blahs

OSF HealthCare Newsroom

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It's estimated that Seasonal Affective Disorder, SAD for short, affects 5-million to 8-million people a year in the United States particularly in the colder, winter months when days are shorter and nights are longer.

It is thought to be related to the lack of available sunlight leading to a deficiency of Vitamin D, which, in turn, disrupts a person's natural sleep cycle. The effect on your brain can cause a person to function differently or, potentially, not at all.

"The classic symptoms of Seasonal Affective Disorder mimic those of another depressive disorder so feeling down, feeling blue, lack of energy, poor appetite, sleep disturbance, all of those classic depressive symptoms just related to the changes in seasons," says Luke Raymond, LCPC, Behavioral Health Services manager for Peoria, Illinois - based OSF HealthCare.

As a behavioral health specialist, Luke Raymond works with people suffering from Seasonal Affective Disorder. He says there's a difference between SAD and a case of the occasional winter blahs. If you find your mind and mood are impacting your relationships, ability to work, or social activities, it's something that needs to be addressed.

There are a number of treatment opportunities for Seasonal Affective Disorder.

"The most used is what we call phototherapy – light therapy. There's a bunch of commercially available light-therapy devices that can really be beneficial. Counseling or therapy can be beneficial to help people deal with some of the negative thoughts and emotions that come along with Seasonal Affective Disorder," explains Raymond.

"Medication can be used but that's certainly something that folks would really want to talk over closely with their primary care provider before they go down that road."

Raymond says even simple lifestyle modifications can help.

"What's really beneficial is some lifestyle modification - getting outside even though it's cold as much as you can and absorb that natural sunlight as much as you can. Involve yourself in pleasurable activities, exercise is always beneficial when dealing with these kind of symptoms. In addition to the treatment kind of things you can make some lifestyle modifications that would be helpful, too."

If you are noticing work becoming more difficult, your relationships are being significantly affected, or you are having a tough time functioning on a day-to-day basis, you might want to see a therapist for professional help.

Learn more about [Seasonal Affective Disorder](#).