

THE WINTER BLUES ARE REAL
BY: Melissa Jeremiah, RN, CHCE
Director of Hoosier Uplands Home Health and Hospice

Now that spring is here those who suffer from Winter Seasonal Affective Disorder/SAD may soon experience relief from their illness. Sometimes people say they have the Winter Blues; and people do not take them seriously. However, people with SAD experience things such as: low energy, excess sleep, overeating, weight gain, craving carbs and social withdrawal; much like a bear hibernating during the winter.

There are certain things that may increase your risk of SAD:

Women's risk is 4 times higher than men's.

Living far from the equator; only 1% of those who live in Florida have SAD.

Family history of depression; or if you are diagnosed with depression or bipolar disorder. The symptoms of depression may worsen with the seasons if you have one of these conditions.

Younger adults have a higher risk of SAD than older adults. SAD has even been reported with children and teens.

It is believed that SAD may be caused by an overproduction of melatonin; which delays their circadian rhythms. People with SAD may also produce less Vitamin D; which may play a role in serotonin activity.

Treatments and Therapies for SAD include: medication, light therapy, psychotherapy and vitamin D; which may be used alone or in combination with one another.

Exposure to light in the morning, by taking a walk outside or working on your yard, may help the bodies sleep/wake cycle function properly. Production of serotonin, a chemical in your brain that is key in influencing our mood, is turned on in the morning upon exposure to light. During the winter when there is less sunlight, serotonin levels can drop, making us feel tired and prone to SAD.

42% of Americans have a vitamin D deficiency; from being indoors the majority of the time. Vitamin D is created by your body when sunlight hits the skin and is found in fatty fishes like salmon and tuna, eggs, and mushrooms. Most people associate low vitamin D with SAD, but it can hit at any time of year. Scientists found that when depressed individuals received vitamin D supplements for a year, they had significant improvements in symptoms of depression. The area of the brain associated with depression is also a site of vitamin D receptors, which may explain the link between the two.

If you feel that you need help with SAD please consult with a health care professional; and remember you would go to the doctor for medicine to treat your high blood pressure, and there is no shame in going to treat your depression. Take charge of your health and get your life back.

Research for this article was obtained through The National Institute of Mental Health.