

## **Winter Blues or Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD)?**

### ***Wellness and self-care in the Chicago Winter***

Sure, it's normal to have some days that you feel down in the dumps. Add some snow to the frigid temps and cabin fever may start to run rampant in your home. But, what if your mood and energy level just won't bounce back after a week or more and you notice that your relationships and responsibilities at home, school or work start to suffer. Seasonal affective disorder (also known as SAD) is a type of depression that comes and goes based on the season. While the condition may strike during any season, SAD seems to be triggered most often during late fall or early winter and seems to improve during the sunnier days of spring and summer. Researches indicate SAD appears to be linked to a biochemical imbalance in the brain brought on by changes in the amount of daylight one receives. While it's estimated that approximately 10 million Americans suffer from this condition, many more may suffer in silence. One may suffer at any age, although the typical age of onset is between the ages of 18 and 30 and occur more often in women than in men. Do any of the below symptoms sound familiar?

### **Symptoms of S.A.D.**

- Fatigue
- Sadness or depression on most days
- Feeling of worthlessness and helplessness
- Short Temper
- Lack of interest or motivation
- Social withdrawal
- Anxiety
- Difficulty concentrating
- Sleep changes (increase or decrease)
- Increase in unhealthy comfort foods
- Increase in substance use

### **Tips to manage S.A.D.**

- Increase exposure to natural sunlight
- Healthy eating
- Maintaining a consistent sleep schedule to maximize wakefulness during the day
- Spend more time with family and friends
- Stay active
- Counseling / Therapy
- Use of an artificial bright lamp / light therapy
- Anti-depressant medication when warranted per medical advice

Mental health is key to overall physical health and wellbeing. If your seasonal sadness worsens, you may want to seek help from a mental health professional, such as a therapist, counselor or psychologist. Mental health professionals can help determine if someone has seasonal affective disorder and determine how best to treat it. Through the use of therapy, research has shown us that cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) is an effective treatment for SAD and other depressive disorders. Therapy may also have more long-term benefits to someone needing to work through some situational events in their life. If you feel you may be suffering from SAD or any depression or anxiety for that matter, please contact us to set up an appointment right away. Our staff at BZA Behavioral are highly qualified and trained to address depressive conditions such as SAD and other mental health conditions. With the right treatment, SAD can be treated effectively.

**Additional Resources:**

*National Institute of Mental Health:*  
[www.nimh.nih.gov](http://www.nimh.nih.gov)

*Psychology Today:*  
[www.psychologytoday.com](http://www.psychologytoday.com)