

The “Winter Blues” – Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD)

submitted by NSTU Insurance Trustees

With the hype and excitement of the holiday season behind us and the prospect of a long winter ahead, this can be a difficult time for some people. Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD), often referred to as the “winter blues”, is a type of depression related to the change in the seasons.

In Canada, SAD affects around 3 per cent of Canadians each year, with approximately 15 per cent experiencing milder forms of SAD. This disorder often impacts children and teenagers. Also, women have a higher risk of experiencing SAD than men. Additionally, with a history of depression comes a higher risk of experiencing SAD. Factor in the isolation and uncertainty related to the COVID-19 pandemic, and one could expect that these statistics will be on the rise.

Those who experience Seasonal Affective Disorder often deal with the following symptoms:

- **Appetite changes, including increased cravings for sugary or starchy foods;**
- **Avoidance of people or activities previously enjoyed;**
- **Difficulty in concentrating;**

- **Daytime fatigue;**
- **Feeling tense or stressed;**
- **Irritability;**
- **Sense of hopelessness;**
- **Weight gain.**

For people who deal with the “winter blues”, all is not lost. There are many ways to minimize the effects of SAD, including some of the following treatments and preventative methods to support yourself or family and friends dealing with Seasonal Affective Disorder symptoms.

Meet with a Healthcare Practitioner – SAD is a treatable disorder, so discussing medical treatment or support from a qualified healthcare practitioner can be a useful first step in identifying the ideal treatment option(s).

Light Therapy – Using light therapy has provided relief for 60 to 80 per cent of people who suffer from SAD. Sitting for 30 minutes in front of a special fluorescent light that simulates natural outdoor light can help improve mood and energy levels.

Cognitive Behavioral Therapy – This therapy works to replace negative thoughts with positive thoughts. It can be used in conjunction with light therapy.

Self-help – Some self-help strategies include regular exercise, good sleeping habits, and a healthy diet. It is also important to stay connected with family and friends to improve your mood.

Some other everyday tips to ease winter SAD symptoms include: avoiding alcohol and being aware of your caffeine intake, finding some time to get outside during the day, keeping a journal to help you deal with any negative feelings, resisting the urge to eat unhealthy, sugary or high carbohydrate foods, and taking vitamin D supplements or eating foods high in vitamin D. We all experience the “winter blues” from time to time, but if you are struggling, please know you are not alone and there is help available to you!

For more information on SAD and benefits available to assist you with the “Winter Blues”, please visit our website at nstuinsurance.ca.

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