NSTU GROUP INSURANCE TRUST

Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD)

As educators, we pour our energy into supporting students, it's important to remember that our own mental health matters too. One challenge that often arises during the fall and winter months is Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD) – a form of depression that follows a seasonal pattern, most commonly appearing as the days get shorter and darker.

SAD is more than just the "winter blues". While many people notice a dip in energy during the colder months, SAD can significantly impact mood, sleep, and motivation.

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

These symptoms can affect not only personal well-being, but also how we show up in the classroom.

Teaching is an emotionally demanding profession, and shorter daylight hours can compound feelings of exhaustion. Add in the busy rhythm of the school year – grading, parent meetings, extracurriculars – and it's easy to see how educators may be at higher risk of feeling overwhelmed during this season.

While everyone experiences SAD differently, research and practical experience point to a few approaches that can help

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% 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 healthy diet. It is also important to stay connected with family and friends to improve 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
- taking vitamin D supplements or eating foods high in vitamin D.

Seasonal Affective Disorder is common, and it's nothing to be ashamed of. By recognizing the signs and taking proactive steps, teachers can care for themselves while continuing to nurture the students who depend on them.

For additional help and support, the following programs and services offered through the NSTU Group Insurance and Member Assistance Program (MAP) are available:

NSTU Member Assistance Program	Contact Information
NSTU Counselling Services	(902) 477-5621 1-800-565-6788
Employee and Family Assistance Program	1-877-955-6788 www.homeweb.ca

Total Care Medical Plan – Psychologist Services - 80% of the usual and customary charges to a maximum of 20 visits per year.	belairdirect (902) 453-9543 or 1-800-453-9543 (toll-free) Email: GroupBenefitsNS@belairdirect.com

We trust the information outlined above is helpful. Please don't forget to visit our website at www.nstuinsurance.ca or scan the QR code below to review the many benefits and programs available to you through the NSTU Group Insurance Plan.

The NSTU Group Insurance Trustees want to remind you to mark your calendars for the following upcoming initiative:

EDUWellness Grants – For Members by Members

What is the purpose of the EDUWellness Grants?

The For Members by Members EDUWellness Grants have been established to support initiatives that promote the well-being of our plan members in an effort to recognize the tremendous work and efforts put in by you every day. For more information, visit the NSTU Group Insurance Trust website at https://nstuinsurance.ca/grants/the-eduwellness-grant/.

Who is eligible for the grants?

To be eligible, the individual must have a permanent, probationary, or term contract and be a member of the NSTU, PSAANS, or RTO at the time of application. Please be advised that applicants that have received a grant within the last 2 years will not be eligible.

What is the selection process for the EDUWellness Grants?v

The NSTU Group Insurance Trustees will award 10 grants valued at up to $1,500 each. Grants will be scored following the rubric that can be found at https://nstuinsurance.ca/grants/the-eduwellness-grant and awarded to the applicants with the highest overall scores. Please be advised that not all applications will be awarded grants.

What is the deadline to submit applications for the EDUWellness Grants?

Applications must be submitted on/or before 11:59pm on January 15, 2027. Completed projects are due no later than May 31, 2027.

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