

## WINTER BLUES OR DO YOU HAVE SAD?

Cold temperatures and long dark days can leave us feeling pretty low and, for some people, depressed. This may just be the winter blues or it could be SAD: Seasonal Affective Disorder.

### What is Season Affective Disorder?

- Seasonal Affective Disorder or SAD, is a type of depression that is related to the seasons.
- It tends to begin and end at the same time each year – usually starting in autumn and continuing through winter but some people get it in spring-summer.

### What Causes SAD?

- The causes of SAD aren't totally known but the reduced level of sunlight can disrupt the body's internal clock as well as cause a drop in serotonin, a brain chemical known to affect moods.
- The further south you live, and the longer the nights, the more likely you are to develop SAD.
- Women and young people also have a slightly higher risk of developing SAD.

### What are the Symptoms of SAD?

- People with SAD experience some of the symptoms of major depression: low feeling throughout the day, sluggishness, difficulty concentrating, sleep disturbances and loss of interest in activities that are usually enjoyable.
- Other symptoms of winter SAD are:
  - Irritability
  - Difficulty getting along with other people and sensitivity to being rejected
  - Oversleeping but still feeling fatigued
  - Craving for food high in carbohydrates
  - Feeling that arms and legs are leaden

### What can We do to Reduce the Risk of SAD?

- Let the sun in – make your environment as bright and sunny as possible. Open the curtains and sit by the window so you get some sun.
- Go outside – even on a cold or cloudy day, going for a walk outside can help. The best time to go for a walk is within 2 hours of waking as morning light helps to set your body clock.
- Exercise – exercise can help to lift your mood.
- Manage stress and anxiety – stress and anxiety will increase depressed feelings so it's important that these are managed.

### What Else Can Help?

- Omega-3 is being researched as a possible treatment for depression. It is found in oily fish, walnuts, flaxseed and some other foods. A supplement may help the symptoms of SAD.
- Vitamin D deficiency is known to increase depression. Vitamin D is made by our bodies from sunlight so in winter we need to take a supplement to keep the level up.
- Acupuncture can help with the symptoms of depression, stress and anxiety.
- Massage can help to relieve stress and tight muscles.

### What About Seeing a Doctor?

- If you feel the depression is getting worse or interfering with your normal life you should see a doctor – there are medications that may help.
- If you are feeling suicidal or using substances such as alcohol to cope, see a doctor immediately.