

## WINTER BLUES OR DO YOU HAVE SAD?

Cold, wet and dark – winter 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 three things are thought to play a role:
  - Changes in Melatonin - a hormone that has a role in sleep patterns and mood.
  - Changes in Serotonin – the hormone that affects mood, appetite and sleep.
  - Disruption of the body's biological clock (or circadian rhythm) due to less sunlight.

### 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, irritability and loss of interest in activities that are usually enjoyable.
- Other symptoms of winter SAD are:
  - Difficulty waking and oversleeping
  - Extreme tiredness and constantly 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.
- Relax – set some time aside daily for relaxation. Consider doing some yoga, breathing exercises, meditation, listen to some quiet music, or have a warm bath.
- Avoid things that may disturb sleep – especially alcohol, caffeine and cigarettes.
- Manage stress and anxiety – stress and anxiety may increase depressed feelings if not 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 manage the symptoms of depression, stress and anxiety.

### 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.