



EGANVILLE & DISTRICT SENIORS

*Great Ways to Enjoy your Retirement Days!
You Don't Have to be a Senior to Participate or Volunteer*

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Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD)

What is SAD?

An estimated 2% to 3% of the general northern hemisphere population suffers from seasonal affective disorder (SAD), a type of depression that seems to be related to the amount of sunlight that you are exposed to. SAD is worse for most people in the fall and winter. If you have episodes of depression that recur at the same time every year for more than 2 years, you may have SAD, and not just the occasional winter blues.

SAD is a real medical condition that can affect anyone, even people who are not already predisposed to depression. The condition is more common in women than in men. Most people who develop SAD start experiencing symptoms in their 30s. Most people with SAD live in northern climates where there is less sunshine in the winter months.

Signs & symptoms that could be SAD or like major depression. Talk to your doctor if you experience any or all these symptoms.

- feel tired and lethargic, increased sleepiness
- less interest in work or social events.
- inability to concentrate
- sadness or despair
- increased appetite, cravings for sweet and starchy foods, and weight gain (usually occurring in the winter months)
- irritability

What causes SAD?

While the exact cause of SAD is unknown, researchers believe the condition may be related to the body's internal clock, which regulates temperature and hormone production. Nerve centers in the brain control our daily moods and rhythms and are stimulated by the amount of light that enters our eyes.

During the night and in periods of reduced light (as occurs in the winter), a gland in the brain produces a hormone

called *melatonin*, which makes you feel drowsy. SAD may be related to increased levels of melatonin in the body. On dull winter days, people with the condition may have difficulty waking up, and may feel drowsy or "down" during the day.

Other research is looking at the role of serotonin in SAD. Serotonin is a neurotransmitter (chemical in the brain) that helps to regulate mood and behaviour. Sunlight seems to influence serotonin levels. Therefore, the shorter days and longer nights associated with the fall and winter season may cause decreased levels of serotonin.

Treatments?

There are several forms of treatment currently available to help people with SAD. The most effective treatments include a combination of light therapy, medications, and complementary therapies.

Light therapy

Daily exposure to bright light (phototherapy) may help balance certain brain chemicals and reset body rhythms. Usually, light therapy involves sitting in front of a high-intensity fluorescent light source that is meant to simulate daylight. It may take 2 to 4 weeks before symptoms of SAD are relieved with light therapy. Talk to your doctor before choosing light therapy, as it is not appropriate for everyone. There are also certain side effects from this technique, including eye strain, headaches, nausea, and agitation.

Medications

Antidepressant medications, may be used to treat people with more severe cases of SAD. Ask your doctor for more information about medications (and potential side effects) if you suffer from SAD.

Exercise therapy

Daily physical activity helps people overcome fatigue and depression.

Complementary therapy

Certain herbs may help treat symptoms of SAD. For example, St. John's Wort may help ease depression. Talk

to your doctor or pharmacist before taking any herbal products, as these medications may interact with prescription or non-prescription drugs (e.g., antidepressants). If you are already using light therapy, remember that St. John's Wort and some antidepressant medications may increase your sensitivity to light. If you're affected by SAD, what can you do to duck the depression? Here are some things that can help.

Ways to prevent or alleviate symptoms?

Daily exercise

Regular physical activity helps fight fatigue and depression. Remember, even outdoor overcast light is brighter than a light box, so an hour spent outside skating, skiing or walking can help ease symptoms.

Seek the sun

Even during the winter months, go outside as often as possible. Arrange your home and office to maximize daylight.

Take a holiday

If you can, go south for a short holiday to enjoy a dose of sunlight.

Be aware of your moods

Be aware of your moods and energy level and attempt to maintain perspective. But remember that SAD is not your fault. It is a medical condition that can be treated.

You're not alone

If you are experiencing feelings that are greater than mild depression, do not be afraid to ask for help. Talk to your friends, your family, and your doctor. Using your support network can help decrease your feelings of isolation or depression.

**Eganville Seniors Mid Mobility Exercise classes
at the Golden Lake Community Hall.**

Events in February:

- **Low Mobility Exercise
Every Tuesday and Friday at 9:30 am**