

The Impact of Seasonal Affective Disorder on Mental Health

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Do the shorter days of winter and fall make you feel 'blue'? It's normal to have some days when you feel 'blue', but if you feel 'blue' for days at a time and you can't get motivated to do activities you normally enjoy, you may be suffering from seasonal affective disorder (SAD), a type of depression.



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In most cases, SAD begins in young adulthood with symptoms starting in the late fall or early winter and going away during the spring. Both serotonin and melatonin help maintain the body's daily rhythm that is tied to the seasonal night-day cycle. In people with SAD, changes in serotonin and melatonin levels disrupt the normal daily rhythms. As a result, they can no longer adjust to the seasonal changes in day length, leading to sleep, mood, and behavior changes.

Deficits in vitamin D may also exacerbate these problems because vitamin D is believed to promote serotonin activity. In addition to

vitamin D consumed with diet, the body produces vitamin D when exposed to sunlight on the skin. With less daylight in the winter, people with SAD may have lower vitamin D levels, which may further hinder serotonin activity.

Seasonal affective disorder is experienced in the form of symptoms such as:

- Depression: Feeling depressed most of the day, nearly every day.
- Emotional: Feeling miserable, guilty, worthless, or hopeless. Having frequent thoughts of death or suicide.
- Apathy: Losing interest in activities you once enjoyed.
- Anxiety: Feeling tense, agitated, irritated, or unable to tolerate stress.
- Energy level: Feeling lethargic and sluggish or jittery and unable to relax.
- Sleep patterns: Oversleeping or inability to fall asleep. Difficulty staying asleep or waking up too early.
- Weight changes: Loss of appetite, over eating and cravings for carbohydrates (resulting in weight gain).
- Concentration: Wavering attention, difficulty focusing or staying focused. Easily distracted.
- Social withdrawal or isolation (feeling like "hibernating").
- School or work problems.
- Increase in substance use or misuse.

If you think you may be suffering from SAD, talk to your health care provider or a mental health specialist about your concerns. There are multiple options available for treatment and a myriad of strategies to choose from to help manage symptoms.

If you or someone you know is experiencing a mental health emergency, it is important to visit Valeo's Crisis Center located at 400 SW Oakley Avenue.

Valeo's Crisis Center never closes, it is a walk-in emergency clinic, with no appointment necessary. Valeo's 24-Hour Crisis Line is 785-234-3300



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Shawnee County Suicide Prevention Coalition

SCSPC.org

Family Service & Guidance Center (18 and under)

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Topeka, KS 66606
24 Hour Crisis Number
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(HeALS)

Sandy Reams – Group Facilitator
Topeka.Heals@gmail.com
785-249-3792

Valeo
Behavioral Health Care

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