

Seasonal Affective Disorder is on rise with season's shorter days

October 21 2014, by Jim Ritter

October marks the beginning of the SAD season.

Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD) is a type of depression triggered by shorter days and reduced [light](#). So far this month, Loyola University Medical Center psychiatrist Angelos Halaris, MD, already has treated several patients for the disorder.

"We are in the midst of the full-blown SAD season," Halaris said.

Seasonal Affective Disorder affects between 3 percent and 5 percent of the population, depending on what part of the hemisphere the study has been conducted. SAD is thought to be related to a chemical imbalance in the brain brought on by a lack of light due to shorter days and overcast skies.

SAD causes depression, [excessive sleepiness](#), lack of interest/motivation and fatigue, making it difficult to get up in the morning. In the most severe cases, people can stay in bed all day, or even attempt suicide. The season lasts until mid-April.

"Seasonal Affective Disorder should not be taken lightly," Halaris said.

Halaris said four strategies can help:

Sunshine. If possible, spend at least 30 minutes a day outside. Don't wear sunglasses. And if it's not too cold, roll up your sleeves to expose

your skin to sunlight and help relieve symptoms of SAD, Halaris said.

Lights. Your home and work should be as well lit as possible. Open drapes and blinds to let in natural light. In addition, purchase a high-intensity light box designed for SAD therapy. Sit close to the box for 30 to 45 minutes in the morning and 30 to 45 minutes in the evening. Although you can do light therapy on your own, it's best to consult a mental health professional, Halaris said.

Exercise. Exercise for at least 30 minutes a day. Exercise releases endorphins and other brain chemicals that create a sense of well-being and make you feel more energized, Halaris said.

Medications. If sunshine, lights and exercise aren't enough to ward off SAD, see a [mental health](#) professional. Two classes of anti-depressant medications are effective against SAD: monoamine oxidase inhibitors (MAOIs) and selective serotonin/norepinephrine reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs and SNRIs), Halaris said.

Provided by Loyola University Health System

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