SAD: Combatting Seasonal Affective Disorder

Seasonal affective disorder, or SAD, is one type of depression related to the change in season. SAD symptoms begin about the same time each year. If you are like most people, you experience these symptoms at the beginning of the fall season and progresses throughout the colder months.

Symptoms you may experience include low energy, sleeping problems, feeling hopeless and changes in weight. Traditional treatment for SAD includes medications, light therapy and psychotherapy. You can combat SAD symptoms without traditional treatments. If you think you may have the winter blues or you know you have the condition, try these tips to combat your symptoms:

**Enjoy the Sun**

Spend as much time as you can in the sun. Sit by a window or go for a walk when the sun is rising or is the brightest. Natural sunlight improves your mood and helps you develop a more positive outlook about getting past the winter months.

**Exercise to Reduce Depression Symptoms**

Try to exercise at least 30 minutes three to five days per week. Exercise is another way to improve your mood because it relieves stress. During the winter months, you probably are under a lot of stress than during other seasons. Physical activity helps your body produce endorphins. It also increases the amount of oxygen to your brain. Endorphins and increased oxygen to your brain are two important elements in stabilizing your mood. It also keeps SAD symptoms at bay for the entire day.

**Socialize When You Want to be Alone**

One symptom of SAD is isolation. You want to be alone during the colder months. However, to combat SAD, you have to do the exact opposite. Socialize. Connect with other people. Create a social circle you can spend with during the winter months. You may also want to start a hobby to meet and be around more people. Socializing gives you motivation to get going and leave the sadness alone. You have more things to think about and do during the cold months.

**Eat Healthier during the Cold Months**

During the winter months, it is easy to grab junk food because it is so cold. You may crave heavier, more indulgent foods that can pack on the pounds. Eating an unhealthy diet can make SAD symptoms worse. Instead, eat lean meats, vegetables and fruits during the winter months. This helps you avoid gaining weight during the cold months. Some foods you should add to your diet includes certain fatty fish like tuna or salmon. Carbo-loaded snacks are good too. They increase your serotonin. Dark chocolate is another great item to add to your diet because it produces phenylalanine. Phenylalanine increases your dopamine and help with depression symptoms.

SAD can happen to anyone and for any reason. The key is to overcome it. You have the right to be happy during the winter months. By doing simple things, you can stop symptoms associated with SAD. Whether you exercise, eat healthier or socialize, the cold winter months will be gone before you know it.