

GRANDparents Connection



For Grandparents Raising Grandchildren

Seasonal Affective Disorder & Winter Blues

Dear Grandparents,

Winter is quickly approaching and as the days are shorter and outside time becomes less frequent some Americans feel blue. This feeling of sadness is very real and while some experience a mild case others have a very difficult time during the winter and there is a biological reason for this.

SAD or Seasonal Affective Disorder is a type of depression that is directly related to the change in season. Most people who experience SAD see symptoms begin in the fall and continue into the winter months just as the seasons change so can a person's mood.

SAD affects about 6% of American's but as many as 15% of Americans experience a milder case of symptoms. It is important to recognize if you or a loved one may be experiencing SAD or wintertime depression.

Additionally, this year especially, many senior citizens are feeling isolated from family and friends due to the pandemic, checking on each other or getting help if you are not feeling yourself is essential.

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SYMPTOMS of SAD are very similar to depression as it is a form of depression that goes away during warmer months when days are longer. According to the 5th edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, "Depression is a mental health disorder that can result in severe impairments that interfere with or limit one's ability to carry out major life activities, it interferes with ability to live, laugh and love." (Carter, Lobb 2020).

Things to look for include loss of interest, ability to complete daily activities, lingering in bed or unable to get out of bed, depressed mood or lack of appetite for more than two weeks. Of course, other symptoms may be present. Some who experience depression have physical aches and pains from their condition.

People who specifically experience SAD usually live further away from the equator and may have had a history of depression or a family member with a history of depression. Women are more likely to experience SAD as well.

Much like depression SAD may show symptoms of fatigue and decreased energy, inability to focus or concentrate, irritability, social withdrawal, sadness, anxiety, hopelessness, change in sleep patterns, change in weight or appetite. (Carter, Lobb 2020).

Sharing symptoms like these with a healthcare professional and seeking their support could help you to feel better and make SAD a little easier to cope with.

Why WINTER?

The reason winter can be so difficult on our mental and emotional health is not only physical but environmental. Environmentally the days are shorter meaning there is less light. “This lack of light can lead to a change in a person’s brain chemistry. Levels of the neurotransmitter serotonin drop during winter months while levels of sleep promoting melatonin increase. The changes that occur from these chemical changes can create mild depression or the more serious condition, SAD” (Carter, Lobb 2020).

Depression is an illness just like heart disease, cancer, or diabetes. When a person experiences a chronic disease with symptoms like chest pains, they see a cardiologist and receive treatment based on their diagnosis. Few people stop taking medicine for a heart condition and most continue to see a doctor to maintain their health. However, often people put off seeing a doctor if they think they are experiencing depression, some are even embarrassed or don’t want to admit they are not feeling mentally well.

Depression and other mental health illnesses can be dangerous if not treated and can be just as debilitating as other chronic diseases. It is important to keep your emotional health well just as it is important to keep your physical health well.

Many doctors are seeing people via telemedicine now and many insurance companies will cover a telemedicine visit.

If you think you or a loved one needs treatment for depression check with your insurance company and ask your primary doctor for a recommendation just as you would for a cardiologist.

Winter Blues

Just like other mental health issues there are variations in diagnoses and severity of symptoms. For instance, Winter Blues can have symptoms less severe than SAD but they may still make the winter months harder than the summertime for some.

Symptoms of winter blues include feeling sluggish and sleepy, increased or decreased appetite, depressed mood, and feeling less social.

Mental illness is not a new disease, however, you may have noticed that your doctor will ask you about your mental health during a check up or visit. Its important to be honest when talking with your doctor about how you are feeling emotionally so that your physician can provide the best possible treatment for you.

Local Mental Health Resources:

Acute Care Family Support

Acenda, Inc.
1129 Route 9 South - Suite 1
Cape May Court House, NJ 08210
(609) 778-6136

Deaf Enhanced Screening Center

Atlanticare Regional Medical Center - PIP
1925 Pacific Ave.
Atlantic City, NJ 08401
(609) 344-1118

Intensive Outpatient Treatment & Support Services, Transition Toward Wellness Program,

Acenda, Inc.
128 Crest Haven Road
Cape May Court House, NJ 08210
(609) 465-4100

Intensive Family Support Services

Acenda, Inc.
1129 Route 9 South - Suite 1
Cape May Court House, NJ 08210
(609) 778-6136

Don't be afraid to seek help and support when needed.

Ways to Survive Winter Blues...

There are things you can do to get you through SAD and winter blues.

- First you should always consult a doctor about your symptoms.
- Next take time each day to be mindful throughout the day. When drinking your coffee or doing part of your daily routine try to take a few minutes to note your surroundings.
- Deep breathing 7-10 times can help to make us feel calmer so try some slow relaxed breaths, this doesn't take long and can be helpful.
- Try to unplug, find time away from technology and screen time so you can settle your mind down for a while each day.
- Taking time to create something by writing in a journal or engaging in a hobby may help you to feel better as well.
- Cook something or try something new to change things up a little. Your grandchildren may enjoy engaging in a hobby or cooking with you.
- Its hard to socialize right now but this too can be important. Try to connect by phone or virtually to friends and extended family.
- Laughing and singing or dancing can make us feel happier too so try putting on some upbeat music and cutting a rug or telling some jokes to get some good giggles in.
- Finally, take time to care for you, try to get plenty of quality sleep and eat healthy with well balanced meals. Exercise can make us feel better as well so try bundling up and taking a walk.

SAD and winter blues can be difficult but trying to take measures to feel better could help make navigating the winter less difficult, try to stay motivated by realizing that you may have set backs and try tackling each day one at a time.

Pandemic Stress & Anxiety

Just like SAD and winter blues people are experiencing pandemic stress and anxiety now a days. Consider the description of depression in the winter blues and SAD areas of this newsletter as some of these symptoms may be a result of the pandemic.

Again, just like seeking a doctor's advice about a physical condition, seeking assistance for emotional and mental health is very important.

Local Mental Health Resources:

Outpatient

Acenda, Inc.
128 Crest Haven Road
Cape May Court House, NJ 08210
(609) 465-4100

Primary Screening Center, Cape May

Acenda, Inc.
Cape Regional Medical Center
2 Stone Harbor Blvd.
Cape May Court House, NJ 08210
Hotline: (609) 465-5999

Residential Services

Acenda, Inc.
1129 Route 9 South
Cape May Court House, NJ 08210
(609) 465-2740

Self-Help Learning & Recovery Center

4404 Pacific Avenue
Wildwood, NJ 08260
(609) 523-7100

Supported Employment Services

Jersey Cape Diagnostic Training & Opportunity Center
1121 Route 47 - Unit 7 & 8
Rio Grande, NJ 08242
(609) 889-6803

Community Support Services

Jewish Family Service of Atlantic & Cape May Counties
607 North Jerome Avenue
Margate, NJ 08402
(609) 822-8398

NOTES AND CITATIONS:

- Carter, S., MS, & Lobb, J., MPH. (2019). *Beating the Winter Blues* [Power Point]. Lancaster, OH: The Ohio State University, Cooperative Extension.
- Clinic, M. (2017, October 25). Seasonal affective disorder (SAD). Retrieved December 07, 2020, from: <https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/seasonal-affective-disorder/symptoms-causes/syc-20364651>
- Mayo Clinic. (2014, December). Seasonal affective disorder. Retrieved December 07, 2020, from: <https://www.health.harvard.edu/depression/seasonal-affective-disorder-overview>
- National Institute on Mental Health (2017, October 25). Seasonal affective disorder (SAD). Retrieved December 07, 2020, from:

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The Grandparents Raising Grandchildren Support Group

is a program of Rutgers Cooperative Extension of Cape May County Family & Community Health Sciences that provides educational and social support to grandparents residing in Cape May County who are the primary caregivers for their grandchildren.

The GRANDparents Connection is published for grandparents raising their grandchildren.

The **Grandparents Raising Grandchildren Support Group** and all of Rutgers Cooperative Extension's educational programs are offered without regard to race, religion, color, national origin, gender, sexual orientation, or disability.

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