



The weather outside is frightful...especially in Western New York, where we get our share of cold weather and dark grey days. What you need to know: these are both possible triggers for Depressive Disorder with seasonal pattern, what was once known as Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD). This month, we're examining the symptoms of this disorder and giving tips that may relieve symptoms at work and home.

This Isn't Just The Winter Blues

A cold and gloomy day can affect anyone's mood, but the 'winter blues' aren't the same as having a depressive disorder. If you're just feeling a little bit under the weather for a day or two, you might have the winter blues. In that case, find an activity that you like to do, or get together with friends, and you will likely start to feel better.

Depressive disorder with seasonal pattern, on the other hand, is an actual mood disorder with more severe symptoms, and it's longer-lasting, often starting in the fall and continuing into the winter months (it can cause depression in the spring or early summer, but rarely). The specific cause of the disorder is unknown, but research has shown that age, gender, and latitude often come into play (young women in particular are more at risk than other demographics).

Symptoms of Depressive Disorder with seasonal pattern may include:

- Depression
- Anxiety
- Mood changes
- Sleep problems
- Overeating
- Lethargy

How Can You Treat Seasonal Depression?

If you feel like you may be experiencing these symptoms, don't ignore them. This disorder can become more serious if not diagnosed and treated. So how can you treat it?

See your doctor. Reach out to your primary doctor if you are having any concerns or starting to notice a pattern of mood change when the winter months start. Upon diagnosis by a doctor, you may receive medication as a supplement to lifestyle changes.

Get as much sunlight as possible. According to research, the jury is still out on whether Vitamin D supplements help, so focus on getting outside or purchase a light box to get reap the benefits of sunshine.

Eat healthy and exercise. When you are getting the right nutrients and making sure to move, you will have more energy and be less likely to turn to overeating as an unhealthy distraction.

Embrace the season. Focus on activities that enhance your life and give you pleasure even in the coldest weather, like watching Netflix or practicing yoga.

Reach out. If you're struggling, find someone to talk with, be it a counselor or just a good friend. Don't struggle alone. Go to someone you trust, so you are not fighting depression all by yourself. AN EAP counselor can discuss your concerns and help you create an action plan to stabilize your moods.

Accept where you are. Recognize you aren't at your fullest capacity, so be kind to yourself. Don't set difficult goals or take on new responsibilities that you don't think you can handle. Focus on completing your responsibilities the best you can, by breaking down large tasks into smaller ones and prioritizing your goals.

Are you experiencing depressive symptoms?

As part of your EAP benefits, you may receive up to four meetings in person with a Masters Level counselor. If you are experiencing a non-emergency concern, call our general number to talk with a counselor or schedule an appointment. For emergencies, dial 911 directly.