

Seasonal Affective Disorder

For some reason my family decided that Ohio was the place to stay. I'm not talking about my mother and father. I'm talking about those family members who are long gone; the ones with multiple "greats" in front of their names. Family I never knew decided that this area was the best place to put down roots. Perhaps it was the rich soil for growing crops or the friendly communities that are plentiful in this area of the state. I'll never know. But what I'd like to know is: did anybody warn them about Ohio winters?

Now don't go thinking "snow" when I mention Ohio winters. So far this winter we've had no snow to speak of and temperatures have been down right balmy. But around November those thick clouds rolled in like a blanket stretched from horizon to horizon and choked out the sun's rays. The once beautiful fall leaves fell into the dirt, the green grass turned pale, and the empty fields turned brown and muddy. No sir, it's not pretty. Around winter time I start to feel a little "out of sorts". My wife will tell you I'm a bit grumpier, I tend to take more naps, and I eat a little more than usual. I admit it: winter gets me down.

And that's why I'd like to talk about Seasonal Affective Disorder or SAD.

Seasonal affective disorder is a type of problem that usually shows up during the winter season. It begins in late fall or early winter and goes away by spring or summer. A small number of people experience SAD in the summer months and feel better by winter. Doctors think SAD may be related to changes in the amount of daylight during different times of the year. And if you live in Ohio you know that daylight in winter is in short supply.

Some of the common symptoms of SAD are:

- A change in appetite, especially a craving for sweet or starchy foods
- Weight gain
- A heavy feeling in the arms or legs
- A drop in energy level
- Fatigue
- A tendency to oversleep
- Difficulty concentrating
- Irritability
- Avoidance of social situations

Sometimes the anticipation of spring is enough encouragement to keep us going through the winter months, albeit at a slightly slower pace. But if you're having a hard time just getting through your days see your family doctor. He may suggest light therapy which works like a plant lamp for people or he may prescribe something to help with your energy level. Exercise helps. Eating fewer "heavy foods" like red meat, cakes, and cookies and more foods like fruits and vegetables may be a good thing, too. You could find someone to talk to. Perhaps you and your friend can lament the Ohio winters together. Also, the counselors at Pathways are trained to help people through tough times, seasonal affective disorder included.

Me? I exercise. And I take more naps. I figure everything else (the sun, trees, grass, animals) takes it a bit easier in the winter months. Perhaps I should, too. Besides, nobody likes me when I'm grumpy. I do it for them as much as I do it for myself.

I admit it; there is something nice about the change of seasons in this part of the country. That's probably not what compelled my family to settle here but I suppose that's one thing we have that other parts of the country do not. Still, if anybody finds a way to transport some southern sunshine to Ohio in the winter I'll be calling.

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