

Seasonal Affective Disorder (S.A.D.)

Seasonal Affective Disorder (S.A.D.) is a type of depression that affects people during the autumn and winter months. According to the NHS 1 in 15 people in the UK are affected by S.A.D. in the months of September through to April. There are no definitive findings from research which explain its medical causes however it is commonly regarded that the reduction in sunlight is what triggers S.A.D. The lack of sunlight could impact a gland in our brains called the hypothalamus, this gland regulates stress levels, temperature, hunger and blood pressure.



If the hypothalamus is not working correctly it can impact us in a number of negative ways such as low production of serotonin, a hormone that affects appetite and mood. Lower levels of serotonin have been linked to feelings of depression. Another impact may also be increased production of melatonin which is a hormone that can make you feel sleepy. One other area the hypothalamus could also influence is the body's circadian rhythm (body clock) as this works off of natural sunlight and controls functions such as when we wake up in the morning.

Some symptoms associated with S.A.D. include sleeping for longer and struggling to wake up in the morning or having difficulties sleeping, feeling lethargic/sleepy throughout the day, a constant low mood, feeling irritable, despair and/or worthlessness, a lack of interest in your normal day to day activities and impacts on appetite causing either over or under eating.

If you think you may be affected by S.A.D. there are a few things you can do. One of the first things you should do if you're struggling with your mental health is to speak to your GP and get a formal diagnosis, in order to do this they will likely need you to monitor and record your moods for a period of time, potentially up to a couple of months. Things you can do at home to alleviate your symptoms are trying to get as much natural light as possible, talking a walk on your lunch or moving to work next to a window can both help your exposure to natural light. Exercising and healthy eating can also have a positive impact on those suffering with S.A.D.

If you're still struggling your GP can suggest light therapy, a therapy which mimics natural light in order to elevate your brain's chemicals. These lights can be purchased for use at home and research has shown they can have a positive impact relatively quickly. GPs may also suggest Psychological therapy such as Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBT) or Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT). These can help identify triggers for S.A.D. by recognizing seasonal patterns and supporting you in ways of adapting to manage these feelings during the autumn/winter months. Lastly your GP may suggest medication such as anti-depressants if your depression is severe, these can be used to artificially increase the levels of serotonin in the brain.

For further information on the above, please contact emily@agilehrconsulting.com