

Think Well, Be Well

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Coping With Summer-onset Seasonal Affective Disorder

Summer is typically viewed as a season of sunshine, vacations and outdoor fun, but for some, it brings an unexpected wave of depression known as reverse seasonal affective disorder (SAD). While the winter variant of SAD is more well-known, summer-onset SAD is a legitimate condition that can significantly impact one's mood and energy levels. Factors such as extreme heat, disrupted routines and societal pressure to have fun all contribute to this form of seasonal depression.

The National Institute of Mental Health defines SAD as a type of depression characterized by a recurrent seasonal pattern, with symptoms lasting about four to five months out of the year.

This article explores reverse SAD's causes and symptoms and provides tips for coping with the disorder during the summer months.

What Is Reverse SAD?

Unlike its winter counterpart, which often involves oversleeping and overeating, reverse SAD tends to result in sleep loss and reduced appetite. It's important to note that these symptoms can significantly affect daily life and should not be casually dismissed as mere "summer blues." Common symptoms of reverse SAD include:

- Insomnia
- Increased agitation or anxiety
- Poor appetite
- Headaches or migraines
- Weight loss
- Social withdrawal
- Lack of motivation to do anything

What Causes Reverse SAD?

The exact causes of reverse SAD are unknown, but several factors are believed to play a role. Longer daylight hours can interfere with the body's natural circadian rhythm, causing sleep problems and mood alterations. Shifts in serotonin and melatonin levels due to more sunlight can impact mood regulation. Additionally, some individuals are extra sensitive to heat, which can exacerbate discomfort and anxiety. There's also an increased likelihood of developing reverse SAD if there's a family history of mood disorders.

Coping Tips for Reverse SAD

While reverse SAD can be challenging, the following strategies can help manage symptoms of the condition:

- **Acknowledge the condition.** Understanding SAD and accepting that it can occur during summer can help reduce the stigma around getting help.
- **Stay cool.** Keeping your living and working environments cool or taking cold baths can help reduce discomfort associated with warm temperatures and humidity.
- **Maintain a regular sleep schedule.** Going to bed and waking up at the same time every day can help regulate your body's internal clock.
- **Stay hydrated.** Dehydration can exacerbate feelings of lethargy and depression, so it's essential to drink plenty of water.

- **Exercise regularly.** Going outside for a daily walk and other physical activities can help boost your mood and energy levels.
- **Eat a balanced diet.** A diet abundant in fruits, vegetables, lean proteins and whole grains can help relieve symptoms.

Summary

Reverse SAD is a legitimate and often overlooked condition that can significantly impact one's quality of life during the summer months. However, with the right strategies, it's possible to manage its symptoms and improve overall well-being.

Talk to a health care provider if you're experiencing symptoms of SAD. Additionally, if you're concerned about your mental health, talk to your doctor or a licensed mental health professional, or contact the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's National Helpline by calling 800-662-HELP (4357).

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