

## SEASONAL MOOD DISORDERS

### It's a SAD Life

Ajay Kumar, a Chennai bank executive doesn't feel like going on his morning runs any way. He feels listless. The recently married 30-year-old no longer likes waking up in the morning, or go for his workout accompanied by wife Madhavi, also a banker, because it is too hot. "Dressing to work in the morning has become a headache. Ajay keeps trying on and discarding clothes, saying he is looking ugly in them," says Madhavi. "His mood is catching on." Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD) makes many people depressed during monsoons and also in winter when the days are shorter and reduced sunlight affects the hormone balance and reduces the production of serotonin, a mood-elevating brain chemical. But, the growing heat in the summer months could make many people depressed too; a condition called Summer Affective Disorder or Summer Depression.

**CAUSES:** As Ajay Kumar discovered, the long days and the oppressive summer heat and humidity was stressing him out mentally and physically. The heat also interferes with exercise schedules—remember that endorphins released during exercise make you happy. The additional financial burden, like, "We've been using the AC 24X7. How much do you think our next electricity bill will be?" also becomes a stress factor.

**SYMPTOMS:** Low mood, feelings of helplessness and worthlessness, body image issues, loss of appetite, weight loss, feeling lethargic and the need to sleep longer.

**TREATMENT:** Psychologists generally start with Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBT). This includes helping the patient with constructive scheduling of his/her day. Emphasis is on exercise, getting a hobby, 7 hours of sleep daily, socialising and getting a positive attitude. In severe cases, anti-depressants may be prescribed.

**PREVENTION:** Integrating constructive scheduling in all parts of life.



"Some studies have shown that in countries near the equator, like ours, there's a higher prevalence of SAD which most people are unaware of. Mental health professionals see this in the form of increased cases of depression coming to them during summer."

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