



## **MOOD DISORDERS ASSOCIATION OF MANITOBA INC.**

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### **S.A.D. About Summer?**

Source: Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH) in Toronto

It's a beautiful summer day, but you're miserable because you can't sleep or eat and you're anxious for no apparent reason. If you have these symptoms for two or more summers in a row, you may be suffering from a condition called summer Seasonal Affective Disorder (S.A.D.). It's triggered by the changing seasons, just like the more common winter SAD where shortened daylight hours lead to fatigue, depression, weight gain, and carbohydrate cravings. Summer SAD (also known as reverse SAD) has the opposite effect with symptoms including insomnia, weight loss, agitation, and occasionally hypomania (a persistently elevated mood). Depression is also common. Like most cases of depression, women suffering from either form of SAD outnumber men.

#### **What causes it?**

Scientists aren't sure because summer SAD hasn't been well-studied, yet hot weather appears to trigger it. "Some people are very sensitive to their physical environment and have an extreme response to the body's normal reaction to heat," says Dr. Robert Levitan, a clinical researcher at the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health in Toronto.

#### **How you can cope**

Some people with summer SAD find relief with constant air conditioning, cold showers, and swimming. Others get comfort from summer trips to areas with a cool rainy climate, such as Ireland or northern British Columbia. The answer may also include medication such as antidepressants and mood stabilizers, with a dose that either begins or is increased as summer approaches. Antidepressants can also help lower body temperature. If you're concerned about how warm weather appears to be affecting your mood, seek help from a mental health professional.

#### **Body blues**

You have to be diagnosed with summer SAD to experience summer depression. Plenty of women take one look at themselves in shorts, swimsuits, or sleeveless shirts and think longingly of their bulky winter sweaters. No need to hide, says Sandra Friedman, a Vancouver educator and author of *Body Thieves: Help Girls Reclaim Their Natural Bodies and Become Physically Active*.

Take these steps to help yourself feel more at ease in your skin:

- ***Get moving.*** When you start to use your body to run, dance, and jump, you focus more on how your body feels and less on how it looks.
- ***Adjust your attitude.*** Exercise for the purpose of fun, strength, and health, not weight loss.
- ***Quit looking in the mirror.*** You don't need to banish mirrors entirely, of course. But if you're constantly examining your reflection, you begin to see your body as an object that's full of flaws. Just look long enough to make sure your shirt is tucked in, then move on.

***“Self-help works.”***