

Spring Into Mental Health



It is the beginning of March and there are signs that spring is almost here. The snow is melting, the days are getting longer, the sun seems brighter, the air feels warmer, and the birds are returning from their winter vacation.

For most people, the change from short winter days to sunny spring days is a welcome change, but for people living with Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD), it signals that a significant improvement in their mental health may be on the way.

SAD is a seasonal depression that occurs at the same time every year. It is commonly called the “winter blues” because the symptoms are worse in the winter months when the days are shorter and then improve in the spring. However, this term can be misleading because SAD can occur during the summer months.

Researchers have identified three possible causes for SAD:

- **Biological Clock.** The changing sunlight patterns that accompany seasonal changes, disrupts our biological clock, called the circadian rhythm, which lets us know when we should sleep or be awake. This disruption may lead to feelings of depression.
- **Melatonin Levels.** The natural hormone melatonin plays a role in establishing sleep patterns and moods. The change of season can disrupt the balance of melatonin levels and thereby disrupt a person's mood.

Mindful Minute

The long cold winter is coming to an end and it is time to wake up from your hibernation, leave your winter hiding places and connect with family and friends. Pick a sunny day to go for a walk, watch the migrating birds, or enjoy a coffee or meal on an outdoor patio.

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talk

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- **Serotonin Levels.** Serotonin, which is a brain chemical that affects mood, might also play a role in seasonal affective disorder. Reduced sunlight can cause a drop in serotonin levels and possibly lead to depression.

Here are the symptoms of winter-onset and summer-onset seasonal affective disorder.

Winter:

- change in appetite, especially cravings for foods high in carbohydrates
- weight gain
- loss of interest in activities you once enjoyed
- oversleeping
- feelings of anxiety and despair
- difficulty concentrating
- social withdrawal
- fatigue

Summer:

- trouble sleeping
- weight loss
- poor appetite
- anxiety
- irritability

Symptoms generally disappear when spring arrives. For some people, this happens suddenly within a short period of increased activity level. For others, the effects of SAD gradually dissipate. Recovery from SAD is possible and there are several effective treatment options that include light therapy, medication and psychotherapy.

Whether you live with seasonal affective disorder or are simply eager for the warm weather of spring, head outside and enjoy the brilliant blue sky and warm air. Allow spring to brighten your day, lift your spirits, and improve your mental health.

Happy Spring Everyone!



CANADIAN MENTAL
HEALTH ASSOCIATION
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Toronto Branch

It takes a Community

It takes a lot of hard work for a person living with mental health challenges to recover from their illness. It takes a tremendous amount of courage and hope that recovery is possible. It also requires the support of caring and compassionate people who share in the person's hopes and dreams for a meaningful life.

Recovery also involves healing the emotional, physical, and social wounds that are created as a consequence of the illness. Unfortunately for many people living with mental illness, the pain and fear of harsh judgments leads to a life of isolation and loneliness. Often friendships disappear and families are unable to remain connected. The connections with peers, mental health professionals, friends, and family and actively engaging in life activities are important sources of well-being and the recovery process.

For this reason it takes a community to support a person in recovery. A community is about place, belonging, and friendship. It is about joy, and fear, and love and hope. Most importantly it is about caring for others and being cared for. Community is at the heart of our mission at CMHA Toronto. One of the ways we live out our commitment to community is through our three social resource centres (SRC) where clients are provided with a safe and friendly place to call home. Staff and volunteers at the SRCs provide hope, optimism, and support for clients on their journey towards recovery.

Our clients have told us that being hopeful, having a sense of belonging, and engaging in social and recreational activities is a very important part of their quality of life. Over 800 clients participate every year in the activities offered at the SRCs, which include walking clubs, cooking classes, games night, yoga classes, dances, book clubs, arts and crafts. In addition, there are



opportunities for clients to be supported by their peers and to develop leadership capabilities.

But the SRCs are more than a drop-in centre. They are a community in which clients feel like they belong. It is a place where relationships are fostered, and trust is developed. It is a place where people are accepted and valued for who they are, where they develop a sense of purpose and they are recognized for the many gifts that they have. It is a place where dreams and hopes are rekindled. Here is a small sampling of what our clients have told us:

"The SRC gave me a place to go when I was feeling down".

"Today I feel happy because I am here with friends and staff that care a lot about me and they helped me when I needed them most. I thank everyone for being there for me. I hope things can get better."

Community is vital to everyone's mental health, especially people living with mental illness. It strengthens us and connects us. It is the place where all are welcome.

Let us know at Talk@cmha-toronto.net what community means to you.

What's Coming Up!

Mental Health Week:

May 1–7, 2011: Visit www.toronto.cmha.ca for a listing of our Mental Health Week activities.

24th Annual Charity Golf Classic in Support of the Holiday Gift Program:

July 21, 2011 at the Sleepy Hollow Golf & Country Club. For sponsorship and registration information contact Paige Souter at psouter@cmha-toronto.net or at (416)789-7957 ext 237

Workshops

Face to Face: Understanding Mental Illness April 13, 2011 at 9am-4pm Cost \$95

ASIST- Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training: May 11-12, 2011 at 9am – 5pm Cost \$190

For more information on any of these events call us at (416) 789-7957.