Seasonal Affective Disorder

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Seasonal Bipolar

Bipolar disorder with seasonal pattern, commonly referred to as seasonal affective disorder (SAD), is a mental health condition where your symptoms change based on the seasons. In the summer when the days are longer and you are exposed to more sunlight, your depression is lower and energy is higher. In the winter with its short days and extended periods of darkness, depression is high.

The seasons dictating your mood, energy and emotional state puts you in the unique position. On one hand, you have the uncommon knowledge of understanding your triggers and knowing if a depressive or manic episode is coming. On the other hand, you can feel powerless to stop the mood changes.

Surviving Seasonal Affective Disorder

With the transition from summer to winter, this is the perfect time to evaluate the seasonal pattern to your bipolar disorder, understand your symptoms and find effective strategies to maintain a level mood. Here's how:

- **Get educated** – Seeking out addition information about seasonal bipolar disorder is important for anyone wanting to better manage it as many myths exist online. As always, seek out reputable information from reliable sources. Consult your physiatrist and therapist for the most recent data. Many believe that symptoms change in the fall and winter due to changes in circadian rhythms, serotonin and melatonin levels. Serotonin manages mood while melatonin regulates sleep.
- **Get sunlight** – Though the temperature may be dropping outside, there is plenty of sunlight to go around. Moderate exposure to the sun will help regulate needed neurotransmitters. Keep the blinds and shades open during the day to let in as much natural light as possible. If the skies over you are typically gloomy and a move to a tropical island is not in the budget, research and consider investing in a sun lamp. Many find that this strategy effectively manages moods during the winter months.
- **Avoid self-medication** – When symptoms change, many people look around them for convenient solutions. Be aware of negative copings skills, though. A negative coping skill, like self-medication, is a something that provides assistance in the short-term but leads to more problems in the long-term. Take caffeine and alcohol as examples. Caffeine will provide short bursts of energy and attention short-term but too soon the effects will fade and your energy will be worse than previous. Alcohol can work to provide small periods of improved mood but the depressant aspect of alcohol means that the long-term impact is lowered mood and less energy. Instead, make healthy food and drink choices that provide slow release of energy like grains and pasta.

- **Exercise** – Beginning a walking program is a great idea anytime. With seasonal bipolar, this might be the best time for you. Early in the fall, your symptoms are likely in the middle between depression and mania. This means that you have the energy and motivation to walk without the impulsivity to distract you. Researchers believe that brisk walking four times a week releases serotonin into your brain. As mentioned, additional serotonin will help improve your mood and ward off depression. Multitask by

walking outside and getting your sunlight. Along with the other physical and mental health benefits, exercise is a great use of your time and energy.

Conclusion

The fall is the ideal time to evaluate your seasonal bipolar and find new ways to manage the symptoms. You know that periods of depression are bound to occur in the winter but preventing and preparing can limit symptoms. Go for walks, get more sunlight and jump in leaf piles to keep bipolar at bay.