

# Seasonal Affective Disorder

By Tish Vincent

**A**s the winter of 2013–2014 dragged on, therapists handled many questions about seasonal affective disorder.

One January day following a particularly nasty snowstorm, those of us who made it to work gathered to eat pizza and spend time together during the lunch hour. Conversations centered on the recent power outages in the area, trees falling onto houses and blocking driveways, and canceled or altered holiday plans. We were comforted by the food and, more importantly, each other's company.

Winter weather challenged our daily routine—driving to work, walking downtown during lunch, and attending after-work events became difficult. Dealing with the elements was exhausting, and the unremitting snow and frigid temperatures were stressful. One day, my eight-mile drive to work took nearly two hours because of weather conditions and accidents along the route.

## SAD

Individuals may question whether fatigue and discouragement from dealing with the weather are indicative of seasonal affective disorder. Therapists will tell you it's not. Seasonal affective disorder, or SAD, is "a type of depression that occurs at certain times of the year, usually in the winter."<sup>1</sup> In the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* published by the American Psychiatric Association, it is termed "major depressive disorder with seasonal occurrence."<sup>2</sup> Individuals who suffer from SAD experience the symptoms regardless of the harshness of the weather conditions.

Research indicates that SAD is a form of recurrent depression, and those afflicted with it may be affected by shorter daylight



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hours in the autumn and winter months. Sufferers are encouraged to discuss their symptoms with their physicians. A doctor may prescribe medication or refer individuals to a therapist. SAD is a serious condition requiring treatment.

Those with SAD can do some things to ease their suffering. Recommendations include:

- Get adequate sleep.
- Eat a healthy diet.
- Follow instructions for taking medications. Ask your healthcare provider how to manage side effects.

- Watch for early signs that your depression is worsening and have a plan for managing it.
- Exercise more often and take part in activities that make you happy.
- Avoid alcohol or illegal drugs, which can worsen depression.
- Discuss your feelings with people you trust.
- Get outdoors during the daylight hours. If possible, sit in a safe place and remove eyewear to help the sun's rays reach your eyes, which is thought to treat SAD.
- If getting outdoors is impossible, speak with your healthcare provider about light therapy.<sup>3</sup>

## Cabin fever

It is more likely the symptoms of fatigue, irritability, restlessness, and general discomfort most of us experienced this winter are signs of cabin fever. Cabin fever is not a diagnosable condition. You will not find it in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual*, and your insurance company will not pay for your treatment. Nonetheless, it is very real and burdensome.

Suggestions for dealing with cabin fever include:

- Change your diet. Eat lean proteins and consume foods rich in vitamin D.
- Take up an indoor hobby.
- Exercise. Get creative! I discovered that climbing the flights of stairs and walking every floor of the State Bar building is a half-mile according to my pedometer. There's no risk of falling on ice, and I enjoy friendly greetings from coworkers I encounter.

- Get outside. When the winds and snows calm down, go for a snowshoeing or cross-country ski jaunt or engage in other outdoor activities. The sun lifts your mood by allowing your body to produce vitamin D.<sup>4</sup>

Whatever the cause of a bad mood, there are things we can do about it. A quick, easy formula I share with anyone struggling with depression is:

- 15 minutes of housework
- 15 minutes of a hobby
- 15 minutes of exercise
- 15 minutes of talking to a trusted friend

### Moot point

This article will be published when the trees are blooming, the sun is warm, and the winter of 2014 is a memory, but we'll remember the snow, cold, and dangerous driving conditions. Hopefully we'll also remember the tools we need to deal with the depression and restlessness that sometimes plague us in the winter months. ■



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### ENDNOTES

1. U.S. National Library of Medicine, *Seasonal affective disorder* <<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmedhealth/PMH0002499/>> (accessed April 11, 2014).
2. American Psychiatric Association, *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (American Psychiatric Publishing, 5th ed, 2013).
3. U.S. National Library of Medicine, n 1 *supra*.
4. Healthline, *How to Survive Cabin Fever This Winter* <<http://www.healthline.com/health-news/mental-surviving-cabin-fever-this-winter-010814>> (accessed April 11, 2014).

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MCL 600.6013 governs how to calculate the interest on a money judgment in a Michigan state court. Interest is calculated at six-month intervals on January and July of each year, from when the complaint was filed, and is compounded annually.

For a complaint filed after December 31, 1986, the rate as of January 1, 2014 is 2.452 percent. This rate includes the statutory 1 percent.

But a different rule applies for a complaint filed after June 30, 2002 that is based on a written instrument with its own specified interest rate. The rate is the lesser of:

- (1) 13 percent a year, compounded annually; or
- (2) the specified rate, if it is fixed—or if it is variable, the variable rate when the complaint was filed if that rate was legal.

For past rates, see <http://courts.mi.gov/Administration/SCAO/Resources/Documents/other/interest.pdf>.

*As the application of MCL 600.6013 varies depending on the circumstances, you should review the statute carefully.*