

Time-Based Depression

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A time-based depression diagnosis means that you may have a Seasonal Affective Disorder (sometimes called SAD). Or, if you're a woman, you could be suffering from Premenstrual Dysphoric Disorder. Both of these disorders occur within a certain time frame – either seasonally or monthly.

Seasonal Affective Disorder may begin during a certain season – usually during the dark winter months and come to an end when light from the sun is more prevalent during Spring and Summer.

Premenstrual Dysphoric Disorder usually begins just before a woman's monthly cycle, possibly because of hormonal changes in the body, and continues throughout the period. It might last for a week or longer.

It's important to understand time-based depression disorders so that you can navigate the maze of recognizing the symptoms, ensuring a proper diagnosis and selecting the best treatments for the disorder.

You also need to learn how to manage time-based depression disorders and discover the best natural remedies to alleviate the symptoms. This type of depression can move on to even more serious types of depression if not diagnosed and treated, so it's important to learn all you can about them.

Causes of Time-Based Depression

Behavioral changes of humans and animals occur during cold winter months. Many animals hibernate and humans sometimes fall into a low mood. One theory is that SAD may occur because of a lack of serotonin or melatonin and in women it may serve to regulate reproduction.

A recent study on SAD hinted that some people may be more prone to develop the disorder because of personality traits such as coping by

avoiding conflict, being extremely agreeable and open with others and high levels of neuroticism.

Premenstrual Dysphoric Disorder (PMDD) is another time-based type of depression that affects women who may have a negative reaction to hormonal changes during the menstrual cycle.

During the menstrual cycle, changes in serotonin levels may also occur. Serotonin is a chemical of the brain which assists in transmitting signals from the nerves. Mood, mental acuity, pain and sleep are all connected with the brain cells which control the brain's signals.

Hormonal changes in women may also cause a lower-than-normal serotonin levels and normally occurs each month during the menstrual cycle. There is light at the end of the tunnel in both SAD and PMDD when the dark days are gone and the menstrual cycle has run its course.

But, both of these disorders may affect your lifestyle to the point that you become more depressed and have a more difficult time getting yourself out of the time-based depression.

Recognizing the Symptoms of Time-Based Depression

Just as some types of animals retreat to their caves to hibernate during the cold, dark winter months, humans also feel the need to cut activities and stay warm in the confines of their homes.

Seasonal Affective Disorder is a major depressive disorder that often begins during the chilly fall months and could continue into the winter months. Lack of exercise and sunlight may bring on depression, feelings of hopelessness, fatigue and social withdrawal.

SAD may also cause other severe symptoms such as loss of interest in social or other activities, thoughts of suicide, loss of sleep and appetite issues, oversleeping, lack of mental acuity, nausea, cravings - such as for carbohydrates - and agitation.

It's not until the sun breaks out of the surrounding bleakness until we begin to feel better and want to get outdoors and experience life again. Some symptoms of SAD may be severe, but usually go away with the advent of Spring.

Although SAD most often occurs during the winter months, some experience symptoms during the summer months and the symptoms may include all of the above, plus exaggerated feelings of anxiety. Over 3 million people in the U.S. alone are diagnosed with SAD each year, but it is treatable by medical professionals.

Depression and anxiety are standard symptoms of PMDD in women. Other behavioral changes might occur, but are usually resolved when the cycle of menstruation begins. Mood changes may be so severe that work and relationships may be damaged.

Other symptoms are extreme sadness, irritability, anger, hopelessness, sleep issues and physical symptoms such as tender breasts and bloating. These symptoms can be debilitating and make it difficult to carry on with your usual activities.

Symptoms of PMDD usually begin about a week or 10 days from the onset of the menstrual cycle and may continue a few days during the period. Medications and lifestyle changes may alleviate some of the symptoms of PMDD.

Diagnosis and Treatments for Time-Based Depression

When a doctor suspects SAD, four criteria must be met:

1. The patient complains of depression during certain times of the year.
2. Has gone through at least two years of the episodes.
3. Had no major depression during other times of the year.
4. The seasonal depression should outnumber the occurrences of depressions that the patient has experienced during his lifetime.

Treatments for SAD, which occurs in winter months, include a timed supplement of melatonin (hormone), cognitive-behavioral therapy, light

therapy and ionized-air. Light therapy uses a light box that emits more lumens than the traditional incandescent lamp.

Light therapy, dawn stimulation, the use of SSRI (anti-depressants), negative air ionization, Modafinil, Vitamin D supplements and physical exercise are all proven to be effective in treating SAD. Psychotherapy may also be advised if you have bipolar disorder in addition to SAD.

To diagnose PMDD, the healthcare provider often takes a look at the risk factors of the woman - such as having a family history of PMS or PMDD. A family or personal history of mood disorders such as depression and postpartum depression may also be factors considered in the diagnosis. Those women who smoke are also at a higher risk.

Breast tenderness and bloating before and during the menstrual cycle may also indicate PMDD. Food cravings, cramps, fatigue and moodiness are also symptoms of PMDD. But, unlike PMS, the same symptoms when a woman has PMDD may be debilitating and effect every area of her life – social, work, relationships or school.

Treatment for PMDD often includes antidepressants, birth control pills, nutritional supplements that include high levels of Vitamin B-6, magnesium and L-tryptophan. Diet and lifestyle changes may also help.

Tips for Managing Time-Based Depression

If you've been diagnosed with SAD, look into getting a light box to ease the symptoms during the affected months. Patients who have been diagnosed with SAD usually require sunlight about 24 times more than the average person.

You'll need to use the light box for about an hour to benefit from the natural sunlight effect. Prescribed medications such as the timed-release version of the antidepressant, bupropion seem to help those with a history of time-based depression.

Your healthcare provider may want you to begin treatment with an antidepressant before your symptoms begin during the year and may also

recommend that you continue taking the medication throughout the year.

Remember that it may take a few weeks for you to realize the full effects of an antidepressant – or, you may need to try several types before you settle on one which works best for you.

Be sure to tell your doctor if you have bipolar disorder as light therapy or some antidepressants may potentially cause a manic episode. Antidepressants and birth control pills are often prescribed by physicians to reduce the emotional ramifications of PMDD.

Selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs) like fluoxetine can lessen the symptoms of insomnia, fatigue and food cravings. Boosting your calcium intake by taking 1,200 mgs of the supplement, plus taking other vitamins such as B-6 and magnesium are also very effective to reduce the debilitating symptoms of PMDD.

Stress management has been found to be an effective treatment for PMDD and regular exercise is a good way to release the serotonin manufactured in the brain. Serotonin sends “happy” signals to lift your mood – it lifts your spirits.

Anti-inflammatory medications may also work in the treatment of PMDD. There is pain associated with the menstrual cycle and these medications can help alleviate those symptoms and make it easier to function.

Diet and exercise are critical components in treating PMDD and you should decrease salt, caffeine, sugar and alcohol and increase protein and carbohydrates to be sure your body is functioning properly.

Let your doctor guide you in treatments you should choose because your other medications and health issues should be taken into consideration. Don't be discouraged if one treatment doesn't work.

It may take some trial and error when choosing treatments to get the exact treatment that finally works for you, so be patient and know that there can be light at the end of the tunnel.

Best Natural Remedies for Time-Based Depression

Many people turn to a non-drug regimen to help with time-based depression, and there are natural remedies that can help. Typical Western medicine uses treatments that usually require medications and many aren't comfortable with the side effects that may occur.

Alternative treatments may range from diet and exercise and lifestyle changes to mental treatments such as biofeedback. Acupuncture, aromatherapy and chiropractic sessions may also help relieve some of the symptoms of time-based depression.

Guided imagery has been proven to help mild forms of depression and hypnosis is also a much-used method. Dietary supplements to help boost the body's levels of serotonin and other deficiencies may also be recommended.

Massage therapy helps to relax the body and wash away the stress that comes every season and other relaxation techniques such as yoga can also be helpful. Some are sold on herbal supplements such as St. John's wort to decrease mild symptoms of time-based depression.

SAME and 5-HTP are supplements studied to ward off mild depression. Chasteberry (*Vitex agnus-castus*) is known to reduce symptoms of PMDD such as mood swings, irritability, cramps, breast tenderness, food cravings and bloating.

Since the Food and Drug Administration does not regulate herbal supplements, don't take any supplement until you've spoken to your doctor about it as they could interact negatively with other medications you take.

Meditation and yoga are the most used methods of relieving stress which is an integral component of time-based depression. Meditation can help you achieve an altered state of consciousness which in turn helps you relax.

With the practice of yoga, you achieve meditation and relaxing breathing techniques that help you relax. There are various types of yoga – from stretches and silent meditation to more extreme versions.

Mind and body exercises, when combined can boost your sense of calmness, relax you and improve your sense of balance and flexibility and increase your overall health. Aerobic exercise helps your cardiac functioning and sends messages to the brain to release serotonin – the happy chemical in the brain.

Music is a form of natural therapy and has been used to boost feelings of well-being and calm. During World War II, music was played for wounded soldiers in hospitals and found it so helpful that the VA introduced music therapy programs as part of the treatments.

Natural treatment for time-based depression also includes making some lifestyle changes to avoid certain triggers for depression. One way to minimize symptoms is to cut back on your caffeine intake.

Getting enough sleep is also crucial to helping SAD and PMDD patients and can be helped by meditation, yoga and mindfulness. Avoiding alcohol and stopping smoking can make a huge difference in your feelings of well-being.

Avoid stressful or emotional situations such as confrontations if at all possible. Suffering from SAD or PMDD makes you particularly susceptible to arguments that can turn in to all out wars.

Be sure to have a conversation with your doctor about your symptoms and any form of alternative medicine you want to try. By conducting a thorough medical evaluation, the doctor can determine if you're suffering from SAD, PMDD or another condition.



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