SEASONAL AFFECTIVE DISORDER (S.A.D.)

The initials S.A.D. are very appropriate for Seasonal Affective Disorder because that is exactly how people feel in late winter or early spring who have inherited S.A.D.

About 15% of the population has a genetic tendency toward Seasonal Affective Disorder, which means that if they don’t get enough sunlight for a few weeks or months, they get depressed. People who live in sunny California may never know they have it, since they have lots of sunlight year round, unless they live in downtown LA where smog keeps lots of the sunlight out year round. And it is not just the continual darkness that gets people down, although that could be a small part of it. Millions of people who have inherited Seasonal Affective Disorder happen to live in climates where the daily sunlight is minimal in winter months, like Northern United States or Northern Europe, and especially places like Alaska—where in some places there is no sunlight at all for several months in the winter. The suicide rate in Alaska goes up in February and March because of S.A.D. These people develop low serotonin levels, and serotonin is the main chemical God put in our brains to keep us happy. In fact, we need serotonin to have love, joy, peace, patience, and the fruit of the Spirit. Living a godly life helps most people to have a higher serotonin level.

Being an angry, bitter person depletes serotonin and causes depression, which is often called “anger turned inward.” When depressed people come to our Meier Clinics Day Program, I ask them a ton of questions to try to figure out what is causing their low serotonin level. The vast majority are very nice people—sometimes too nice—who stuff their anger and let others take advantage of them. They may have false guilt, or other anger-related problems. But some people inherit a low serotonin level and it stays low their whole lives unless they take medication. Some have bipolar or other genetic causes. Some have a low serotonin level because they aren’t eating enough tryptophan (bananas is a great source) and Vitamin B6. Others have a low thyroid, with dry skin, hair loss, constipation, feeling colder than others, weight gain, and depression. People with Seasonal Affective Disorder are usually pretty happy most of the year, but get depressed every February or March and don’t know why. They make up a reason in their own minds as to what they must be upset about, but it is actually nothing at all. It is their serotonin level playing a trick on them, making them think their life is worse than it is, like having steamed up glasses—that would make everything around you look—well, worse! We need sunlight to build up serotonin and also to build up vitamin D, which may be related to all this too.

There are three solutions to avoiding Seasonal Affective Disorder:

1. Get a special S.A.D. lamp; you can find them online. Be sure you get one that has at least 10,000 lumens of light and works 18 inches away from you rather than 12 inches like some of them say. They usually cost two or three hundred dollars. You simply sit within eighteen inches of one to read your morning paper or watch TV or whatever else you do when you are sitting down. Only thirty minutes a day during the dark winter months is all that is needed to get rid of S.A.D.

2. Take a serotonin antidepressant during the winter months, starting a month or two before it starts getting dark all the time and quitting when it gets sunny again, or just stay on it year round if you like. You eat tryptophan in your diet and B6 carries it into the brain where it turns into serotonin. But serotonin antidepressants, known as “selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors,” simply inhibit the “drains” in your brain where serotonin gets depleted and helps you hang on to more of the serotonin. To Your Health Liquid Vitamins (www.tyh.us) contains tryptophan and B6 in sufficient quantities and is enough for some people with mild S.A.D., but you may still need a sunlamp or an antidepressant to help you hang unto the serotonin in the winter months when you are producing less.

3. Move to California, Texas or another southern State where you have lots of sunshine year round!

For more information about genetic factors that can make you feel “blue,” read my book *Blue Genes* by Tyndale Publishers.