



Seasonal stress

Reflection guide

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Overview

By the end of this session, you will be able to:

- Discuss what seasonal stress is and what causes it
- Understand seasonal changes on physiology and the human response
- Discuss tips and tactics for managing seasonal stress and boosting resiliency

Key takeaways



Main points:



Learning insights:



What areas do I need to improve on?



My action plan:

Job aids or activity materials

What is causing you stress this season?

Check off all of these examples that apply to you.

Mind

- Constant worries
- Mental exhaustion
- Lack of creativity under pressure
- Negative attitude exacerbates situation
- Unable to let go of pressure
- Not receiving approval from others
- Having to do something you don't want to do
- Someone getting upset with you
- Feeling that you've been treated unfairly
- Feeling overwhelmed
- Already being upset over something else

Body

- Fatigue – year-end parties, etc.
- Illness or pain
- Physical strain of daily work/life
- Repetitive movement injuries from work
- Migraines from noisy environment
- Extra activity shopping, entertaining, etc.
- Sitting / standing for long periods of time
- “Hunger headache” from not eating
- Blood sugar levels create mood swings

Career

- Conflict with manager / colleagues
- Negative work environment
- Dealing with angry customers
- Concern over layoffs / downsizing
- No recognition
- Your work violates your core values
- Pressure to “keep up” with skill training

- You don't have the right tools to do the job
- No creativity / challenge
- No control
- Understaffed and overworked department
- Long hours
- Long and draining commute
- Pressure to meet deadlines

Relationships

- Old family wounds and tensions
- Communication problems with partner
- Lack of intimacy
- New marriage
- New baby
- Not enough time with loved ones
- Parenting challenges
- Health problems with family members
- Threat of separation or divorce
- Lack of meaningful friendships
- Tension because of family customs
- Disagreements over child-rearing
- Lack of a romantic relationship
- Unhealthy relationships

Finance

- Too many gifts to buy
- Worried about holiday bills
- Not enough money to enjoy life
- Worried about long term finances
- Too many bills to pay
- Pressure to keep up with the neighbours
- Concern over retirement savings
- Major financial setback / loss
- Medical bills

Leisure / balance

- No personal time left
- No time to relax
- Leisure time seems empty and unfulfilling
- No quiet space or place to relax at home
- Your personal time is always interrupted
- Life pressures have caused you to give up a favorite hobby for now

What is seasonal affective disorder (SAD)?

- A mood disorder (in the same family as major depressive disorder) that occurs at the same time every year
- Begins in the fall when the days are becoming shorter and generally lasts until spring

Who suffers from major depressive disorder and seasonal affective disorder?

Two in ten Canadians will suffer from a mood disorder, such as major depressive disorder (sometimes called depression) and seasonal affective disorder (SAD). Five percent of the Canadian workforce suffers from depression and is working while in a depressed condition. SAD affects millions worldwide, primarily occurring in areas of higher latitudes from the equator. Two to three percent of Canadians experience SAD, a mood disorder that appears to be related to the amount of sunlight one is exposed to.

What causes major depressive disorder and seasonal affective disorder?

There are many popular but inaccurate beliefs about what causes major depressive disorder: it's a personality weakness, it's high levels of stress, it's genetic. While major depressive disorder runs in some families, research has established that major depressive disorder is brain disorder, similar to Parkinson's Disease or Dementia. It is caused by imbalance in specific neurotransmitters such as serotonin and dopamine that regulate many brain and body functions, including sleep, mood, concentration and memory.

Major depressive disorder is often characterized by a change in mood (sad, despondent, angry, or irritable) and a loss of interest in typically pleasurable activities and relationships. Other symptoms include, weight changes, sleep disturbance, lethargy, difficulty focusing or concentrating, impaired memory, difficulty controlling mood and emotions and suicidal thoughts. Major depressive disorder can make it

difficult to complete routine tasks and activities at home and work. Major depressive disorder is treatable, and many people benefit from medication and talk therapy.

The cause of the form of depression referred to as seasonal affective disorder is believed to be related to the body’s internal clock, which regulates temperature and hormone production. During daylight savings time, the body’s production of the hormone melatonin increases – the resulting impact can be SAD.

What exactly causes the hormones and neurotransmitters that control your mood and feelings to go out of balance is not yet fully understood. But we do know how to treat depression and SAD in all its forms from mild to severe.

How does major depressive disorder and seasonal affective disorder differ from “the blues”?

We all have times when we are “blue” or sad. These times are very different from depression in many important ways. The chart below outlines these key differences.

Characteristic	Major depressive disorder	SAD	Sadness or “the blues”
Essential distinction	A mood disorder	A mood disorder	A normal reaction to life situations
Symptoms	Multiple: Mood changes, impaired cognition, weight changes, loss of enjoyment in pleasurable	Multiple: Mood changes, impaired sleep and cognition, low energy, cravings for sweets	Single: Mainly anxious or sad mood often triggered by holiday stressors
Duration	Persists	Seasonal – mostly in fall and winter	Brief – over the holidays
Suicide Potential	Suicidal thoughts	Rarely produces suicidal thoughts	Rarely produces suicidal thoughts

Treatment	Responds to specific medication and/or talk therapy	Responds to specific changes in light therapy, physical activity, talk therapy and medication	Responds to a personal support, short-term therapy, healthy coping strategies and/or time to heal
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Restful sleep

Most of us find that there is never enough time in the day to get everything done. Many of us try to “make time” by cutting back on the amount we sleep.

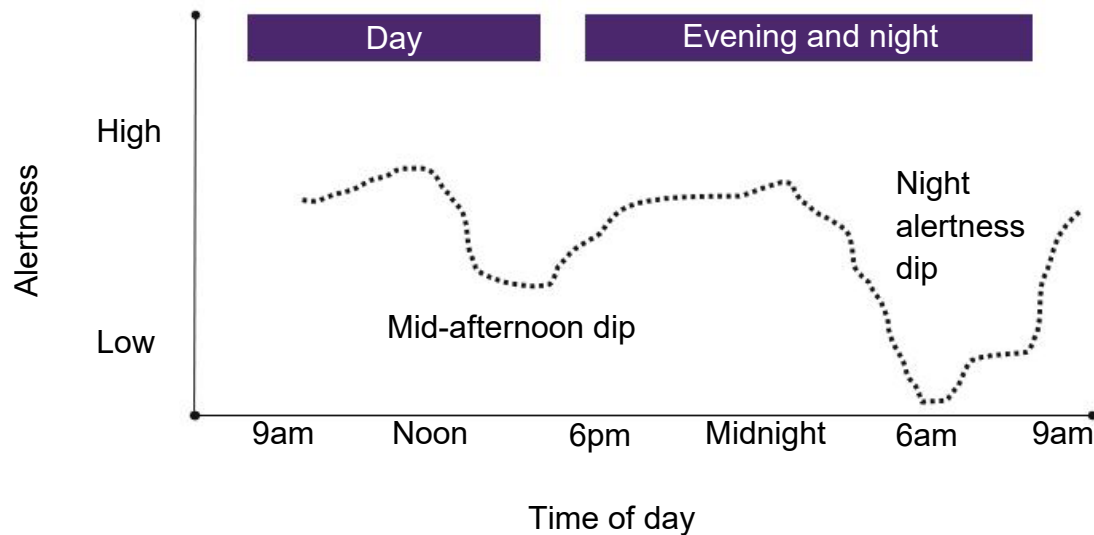
- Before the invention of the light bulb, people slept on average 10 hours/night. Today, North Americans average 6.9 hours of sleep on weeknights and 7.5 hours per night on weekends
- In a survey of 1,500 Canadians, over half (54%) said they cut back on sleep when they need more time to meet the demands of work and family

Does this sound like you?

What is the cost to your health and wellbeing when you don't get enough sleep?

How does being tired and fatigued influence your productivity and performance at work?

A few words about your circadian rhythm



Holiday sleep tips

1. Stick to a regular schedule. Go to bed close to your accustomed hour and get up when you usually do. Holiday meals tend to be erratic, but, as much as is possible, try to eat at regular hours and avoid eating a heavy meal close to bedtime.
2. All night parties cause havoc with the circadian rhythm. It may take several days to recover and get back to the regular schedule.
3. Travel safely. Never drive when you're tired. Drowsy driving is a major cause of traffic accidents and death. Get adequate sleep before leaving and, if it's a long trip, break it up into segments so you get the rest you need. If you are flying in from across the country, plan to arrive a day or two early to get over the effects of jet lag.
4. If you have company coming to stay, make sure the sleeping arrangements are adequate. Don't give up your bed to a relative and try to sleep on the lumpy, narrow couch. Get them a hotel room if necessary. The same is true if you're doing the visiting. Make sure you have a comfortable bed in a quiet room. Again, for your own well-being, get a hotel room if you need to.
5. Never be afraid or ashamed to tell relatives and friends that you suffer from a chronic sleep disorder or other chronic illness. Explain why you need to stick to a schedule and follow the suggestions above.

Additional tips and strategies to improve sleep quality

- Invest in a good quality mattress, warm blanket and the right pillow
- Block out noise by wearing earplugs or unplugging the phone
- Practice a relaxing, pre-sleep routine before going to bed. Meditate. Read
- Sleep in a quiet, protected part of the house
- Ensure your sleeping area is well ventilated, not too hot, or cold
- Turn the digital alarm clock toward the wall so its glow doesn't disturb you
- Get absolute darkness by using "black out" drapes or wear an eye shade
- Only use the bedroom for sleeping or intimacy. Do not watch TV or work in bed
- Use sleeping pills only for short-term, emergency use; avoid dependency
- Make your house secure with quality alarms and locks
- Avoid drinking anything with caffeine (coffee, soft drinks, tea) at least four hours before going to bed
- Make every effort to reduce or avoid drugs, which impact your sleep
- Exercise regularly at least 2-3 hours before bedtime. Fit people sleep better than unfit ones
- About an hour before bedtime, take a hot bath with calming bath salts or oils
- No arguments or discussions about loaded topics such as money before sleep
- Don't nap during the day when you need to get a good night's sleep

Tips for thriving during the holidays

The holidays are fun? This shouldn't be a question, but for those trying to juggle work and home with presents, parties, and perfection, it can be one of the most taxing times of the year. If you're left feeling snowed under by the season, then clear some time out of your hectic holiday schedule to take in the tips below.

1. Start sooner rather than later. Set aside a little time every day to prepare for the holidays. Spacing out your errands will help ease the pressure and reduce the likelihood of last-minute panic situations. Purchase your gifts and get them wrapped early.
2. Be realistic. A romanticized vision of the 'perfect' holiday with your 'perfect' family is sure to disappoint. Embrace the fact that stress and minor conflict go hand-in-hand with the joy and fun of the holiday season. Relax and accept the imperfections of yourself and your family.
3. Stick to your budget. It's not hard get caught up in the flurry of holiday spending, but once the sparkle of the holidays is over, you could be left with a very stark, very real bill. Avoid starting the New Year in the red: draw up a realistic financial plan for the season and honour it.

4. Try to keep stress to a minimum. Take a few minutes occasionally to recuperate from all the activities. Deep breathing or meditation, even for five minutes, can help you relax. No place for privacy? Lock yourself in the bathroom.
5. Ask and you will receive. Recruit the support of other family members. Just because they're not volunteering, doesn't mean they don't want to help. Children especially enjoy being part of the action. Younger kids can make cards, decorate, or tidy up while older children can help out with gift wrapping, food preparation and other errands.
6. Just say "no." During the holidays, work, personal and family obligations can wreak havoc on your daily routine, cut into your free time and leave you feeling overwhelmed. Be selective and say "yes" only to those invites you really want to attend. Send a card to those you decline and, if you're concerned about offending the host, a small gift for guests to enjoy (wine, flowers, etc.).
7. Stay healthy. Make an effort to get enough sleep and squeeze in physical activity whenever possible. Being well-rested and healthy will help you cope better with your stress.
8. Eat well. Enjoy holiday meals but keep portions small. Indigestion and heartburn can play havoc with the enjoyment of the season, and they can disrupt your sleep, so you get up the next day tired and irritable. Eat snack foods in moderation. Chocolates and rich holiday treats can also lead to stomach distress.
9. Drink responsibly. Keep alcohol consumption to a minimum and avoid drinking near bedtime. Alcohol may send you into a deep sleep at first, but later on it disrupts your sleep patterns, leading to a restless and unhealthy sleep. And don't forget those horrible morning-after hangovers.
10. Enjoy the ride. Concentrating on 'the big day' can take away from the fun of getting there. Take pleasure in the here and now of planning, preparation and time spent with family and friends reaching the final holiday destination.

How to help tackle seasonal stress

Get out and about

- Ask family and friends for help if travelling is a part of your holiday plans
- Invite family and friends over for laid back seasonal fun
- Take a brisk walk in the morning or early evening - this is a great way to beat the blues

Volunteer

- Helping others is a great way to improve your mood
- To volunteer, contact your local United Way or call local schools, churches, synagogues or mosques and ask about volunteer opportunities in your neighbourhood

Drink responsibly

- It is easy to overindulge around the holidays, but excessive drinking will only make you feel more depressed
- One drink = 12 ounces of beer, 5 ounces of wine, or one ounce of hard liquor
- The recommended limit for older men is 15 drinks per week and for older women, 10 per week

Accept your feelings

- There's nothing "wrong" with not feeling jolly; many people experience sadness and feelings of loss during the holidays
- Be kind to yourself, seek support, and even laugh at yourself every now and then

Talk to someone

- Don't underestimate the power of friends, family, mentors and neighbours
- Talk about your feelings; it can help you understand why you feel the way you do
- Something as simple as a phone call, a chat over coffee or a nice e-mail or letter can brighten your mood

More tips to beat the holiday blues

- Hit the sack
- Organize
- Let others help
- Include a healthy diet
- Downtime
- Add vitamins
- Yes...it is ok to say no
- Strike a (yoga) pose

My personal wellness plan

Your health and well-being is crucial to your happiness. Making a written and verbal commitment to yourself (and/or someone else important in your life) will bring you closer to achieving your desired state of well-being.

Take a few moments now to think of 2 or 3 things you would like to (need to?) do (start doing, stop doing, do more of...) to get on the road to personal wellness. Then write these actions down and share them with a person sitting near you.

How do they come to life? Are these items SMART? i.e.) specific, measurable, action oriented, realistic and time or duration dated?