

# Seasonal depression is much more than just winter blues

**RAYA MEHNAZ**

When we were younger, winter used to signal joyful things, from winter vacations to warm pithas lovingly made by our grandmothers.

However, as we get older, our relationship with winter is changing as well. That's why many of us who grew up loving winter now seem to associate it with melancholia and desolation.

Dr. Norman Rosenthal, in 1984, coined the term Seasonal Affective Disorder, or SAD, trying to describe why winter in particular can be so distressing.

Saima Jui, Assistant Clinical Psychologist & Researcher at the Department of Clinical Psychology, University of Dhaka, explains that SAD and its manifestations are part of what is traditionally known as a depressive disorder. "The only difference is that these symptoms are more seasonally pronounced," she says.

According to her, the symptoms for this can be anything such as low mood, lack of interest in things, acute feelings of worthlessness, changes in sleep schedule, lack of confidence, and bouts of hopelessness. However, she believes people affected can very well see other forms of manifestations as well, such as the occurrence of automatic negative thoughts.

Sanzana Abedin, third-year student at Bangladesh University of Professionals, describes feeling suffocated this winter.

"I feel like I don't have any energy left, even when I do nothing all day. I lost my appetite and the will to enjoy watching movies or shows. It's as if I have no excitement left in me," she elaborates.

Another student, Rubaiyat Islam Maysha, describes experiencing extreme

emotional intensity during winter. She reflects, "My emotional state is so vulnerable, that my physical strength has also decreased because of it. I get unbelievably tired after doing very little work."

On the other hand, people who are creatively inclined also often experience a block of sorts in their respective creative outlets.

Budding artist and architecture student at Ahsanullah University of Science and Technology Meghamala Aka says, "I work [on art] a lot during the summer and I feel very excited to do it too. But winter makes me very frustrated to the point where I cannot even bring up the will to work on my university projects or my art."

So, what is the solution when people are indeed being affected by winter?

According to Jui, it takes two consecutive years of someone suffering from seasonally transpired symptoms to be diagnosed with SAD, as many other things could contribute to the symptoms. If someone is suffering from the above mentioned symptoms, what they can do first and foremost is go outside and get some sunlight. This can have the most significant impact on someone's mood.

However, if unable, Saima has emphasised taking help of a family member or a friend. She also stresses on the importance of a simple and flexible schedule for someone who is suffering.

Jui asks, "There are many things in life that have no solution, but this one has a very simple and basic solution. Why make life harder with things that are salvageable?"

*Raya Mehnaz likes to live life dangerously — one House MD episode at a time. Send help at fb.com/raya.mehnaz*

PHOTO: ORCHID CHAKMA



## What works better: motivation or routine?

**TANZIM NOOR TANMOY**

As humans, there's an innate urge inside us that gets us motivated to learn new skills and take on meaningful challenges. In fact, a part of our brains is designated as the "seeking system," so we're biologically inclined to do so. Every time we follow this urge, we receive a jolt of dopamine, which in turn makes us happy and makes us seek the same feeling again.

A lot of things come into play when trying to learn something new, the initial spark of motivation, the strict "no pain, no gain" routine, the zestful early days, the seeping reluctance, the cheat days, the cheat weeks, the guilt, the denial, and suddenly you find yourself wondering, "Wait, how has it been two months already?!"

It's easy to lose the zeal that got us started in the beginning midway through the journey. Is the solution then to wait for the same motivation strike again? Or is it to adhere to a routine regardless of how you feel throughout, to reach the end goal?

I wanted to test this out myself. And in a span of three weeks, I attempted to learn to play the guitar.

Here's what happened.

Unlike Will Byers from *Stranger Things*, my will to learn to play this instrument was easily found. The possibility of covering songs by my favourite artists gave me an abundance of motivation to start the process.

I made a routine with about an hour of practice every day from 7.30 PM to 8.30 PM to learn new chords. I also allotted a weekly goal of trying to learn the chords of a song I wanted to play, and that was it.

The first week went by smoothly. However, during the second week, something I'm all too familiar with kicked in: procrastination. Each time I missed a day of practice, the guilt would pile over and make me feel horrible about myself, giving way to more escapism and procrastination.

Soon enough, I changed my routine a bit. Keeping the time at which I would start practicing unchanged, I reduced my expectations of practice to about 30 minutes and left the rest as free time. I could simply not do anything in particular for that extra time which gave me leeway to not feel as bad if I ended up wasting some time.

At the end of three weeks, I can proudly say that I can play ONE song. It's not much, but it's honest work. It did prove to be harder than I anticipated it to be, but I'm still happy I was able to follow through and learn to play one of my favourite songs, "Zombie" by The Cranberries.

This experiment led me to the conclusion that if I have a goal that is worth pursuing, then a good routine with managed expectations and some breathing room is what I can rely on to reach it.

Send Tanmoy suggestions for a new hobby at fb.com/tanmoy.tanzim