

## Shining the Light on Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD)

As the days grow shorter in the fall, does your mood grow darker? If so, you may have seasonal affective disorder (SAD). SAD is a type of depression that affects you at the same time each year, usually in the fall or winter. As the days lengthen in spring and summer, the depression lifts. SAD is a treatable condition, so if you think you may be affected, it's important for you to discuss your symptoms with your doctor.



### Who is affected by SAD?

You're more likely to develop SAD if you:

- are female
- are a teen or young adult
- have a family history of SAD
- live far from the equator

### What are the symptoms?

SAD symptoms are similar to those of clinical depression but also include dramatic mood swings in response to seasonal changes. The symptoms include:

- moodiness and irritability
- sadness
- anxiety
- difficulty concentrating
- increased appetite and a craving for carbohydrates
- weight gain
- decreased interest in activity and a need for more sleep
- drowsiness during the daytime
- problems with work and relationships

### How is it treated?

Treatment for SAD includes light therapy, in which you sit at a certain distance from commercially available fluorescent lights that are brighter than indoor lights but not as bright as sunlight. Treatment is usually in the morning for 30 minutes to two hours depending on the intensity of the light. Don't use any other form of light, such as sunlight, tanning lamps or heat lamps because of the safety risks.

Some people find another form of light therapy called dawn simulation more convenient to use. With dawn simulation, lights in your bedroom are programmed to come on gradually a few hours before you wake up in the morning.

Before starting light therapy, be sure to tell your doctor about any medical conditions you have and medications, including alternative therapies, you are taking.

In addition, your doctor may also prescribe antidepressant medications to treat your SAD or recommend counseling.

### Self-help

Eating a healthy diet and being physically active during the daytime, especially first thing in the morning during winter, may help improve your energy level and relieve your SAD. Try to exercise most days of the week and start slowly with just 10 to 15 minutes of exercise, especially if you have not been physically active for some time. Add a minute every three or four days until you can exercise for 20 to 30 minutes or more at a time.

With treatment, you will soon have the "spring" back in your step year round.