

January 2018 Issue

## Seasonal Affective Disorders (SAD) – Is It a Real Condition?

Many people experience the winter blues or a let-down after the holidays and during the gray days of January and February; however, this is different from Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD).

People who are diagnosed with Seasonal Affective Disorder meet criteria for Major Depressive Disorder. They cycle seasonally, generally suffer during the winter months, and start to feel better in the spring and summer. Some depressive episodes can happen during the summer, but this is rare.



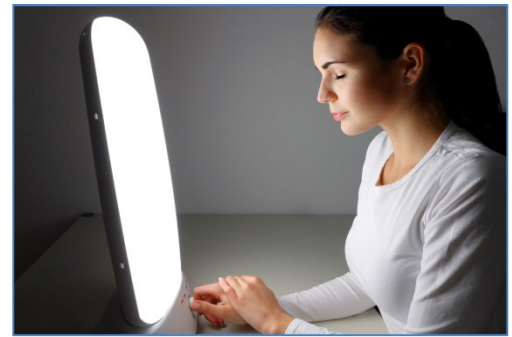
### These factors may increase risk for Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD):

- **Being Female**  
Four times more women than men are diagnosed with SAD.
- **Living Further from the Equator**  
While only 1 percent of people in Florida are diagnosed with SAD, the percentage increases to 9 percent in New England and Alaska.
- **Family History**  
People with a family history of depression of any kind are more likely to develop SAD.
- **Having Depression or Bipolar Disorder**  
Symptoms of depression may worsen with the seasons, but SAD is diagnosed only if the seasonal change is the most common trigger.
- **Younger Age**  
Younger adults - even teens and children - have a greater likelihood of being diagnosed with Seasonal Affective Disorder.

Seasonal Affective Disorder is real, and there is treatment available that can help! If you feel that you are experiencing more than just the winter blues, reach out and seek assistance from your employers' Employee Assistance Program - such as TriHealth EAP, your primary care physician, or another mental health services provider.

# Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD) – Symptoms and Treatment Options

Similar to depression, symptoms of Seasonal Affective Disorder may include fatigue, sadness or a sense of general discontent, crying spells, irritability, trouble concentrating, body aches, loss of sex drive, poor sleep, decreased activity level, and appetite changes, especially overeating and weight gain. If the condition is severe enough, it can be associated with thoughts of suicide.



The symptoms of Seasonal Affective Disorder usually begin late in the year, and last until spring. Typically, SAD symptoms are more intense during the darker months; therefore, the treatment options usually include some form of light therapy.

## Common treatment options for Seasonal Affective Disorder:

- **Exercise:** As it does with other forms of depression, exercise also can help alleviate Seasonal Affective Disorder. Outdoor exercise would be most helpful, but if you can't exercise outside, choose an area that is close to a window.
- **Light Therapy:** Light therapy devices emit light that mimics sunshine and can help in recovery from SAD. The light from therapy boxes is significantly brighter than that of regular light bulbs and is provided in different wavelengths. (See below article on the Role of Technology in Treating SAD.)
- **Take a Vacation:** Travel gives you a break from your daily routine, and even just a few days in a sunny place can be helpful with winter depression.
- **Vitamin D:** A study published in 2014, the Journal of Nutrients found Vitamin D supplementation contributed to significant improvements in Seasonal Affective Disorder symptoms.
- **Talk with Your Physician:** There are a number of screening questions to help diagnose depression, and your doctor will be able to sort out whether you have SAD or some other form of depression.
- **Let the Sunshine In:** Get outside as much as you can during the day. When you are indoors, keep your blinds open to let in as much natural light as possible.

---

## The Role of Technology in Treating Seasonal Affective Disorder

Since researchers first put a name to the condition of Seasonal Affective Disorder, many studies have verified that light therapy can be a positive influence for SAD sufferers, who without treatment become sluggish, sleep more, gain weight and become depressed. Light therapy devices emit light that mimics sunshine and can help in the recovery from SAD. Examples of these types of devices include:

- **Lumie Arabica.** A simple but effective light box, both lightweight and portable, this device treats SAD symptoms in 30-60 minutes.
- **Beurer Bright Light Mini.** This compact option is great for travel. It treats SAD symptoms in about an hour. It's a bit bright if you're also using a computer but is fine to use when reading or doing paperwork.
- **Sad Light Co Diamond 5.** For people with severe SAD symptoms or those who have limited time, this device can help treat symptoms in as few as 20 minutes!
- **Human Charger.** This revolutionary device channels bright light directly to the light-sensitive regions of the brain, where it is most needed. It can be used to increase energy levels, improve mood, increase mental alertness, and reduce the effects of jet lag and winter blues.