

Seasonal Affective Disorder

Seasonal Affective Disorder or S.A.D. is a medical term describing a type of depression brought on by a change in the availability of bright light as the year progresses from summer to winter. Specifically, it refers to depression caused by lack of enough bright light to trigger various hormones that affect the body's circadian rhythms.

No one knows who will become depressed as a result of a lack of light, but many people experience mood changes as winter sets on. The severity of depression can range from mild winter blues to major S.A.D. Some are completely debilitated and unable to function. Many are only marginally aware of the seasonal aspect of their depression. However as more information is becoming readily available, many people are now beginning to notice how lack of light affects their mood.

According to Norman E. Rosenthal, MD, author of *Winter Blues*, a very readable and informative book on Seasonal Affective Disorder, this condition affects women four times more often than men and up to 20% of the population at large struggles to cope with seasonal mood shifts.

Symptoms of SAD

1. Sleep increases and sleep pattern alters
2. Difficulty getting out of bed and getting going in the morning
3. Overall increased lethargy and fatigue
4. Apathy, sadness and/or irritability
5. Increased appetite, carbohydrate craving and weight gain
6. Decreased physical activity

Light Therapy

Light therapy involves use of a light source designed to affect the body as the sun would affect it if there were sunlight available. Light therapy has been shown to be an effective alternative to drugs for treatment of seasonal depression. Sometimes it may be used in conjunction with anti-depressants. Studies have shown that the threshold for light to affect a person's mood is 2500 lux (a measurement of the amount of light that falls on a particular object).

With proper documentation from a doctor, some insurance companies are covering purchase of bright lights as a medical expense.

Resources

Winter Depression Clinic, Oregon Health Sciences University, (503) 494-6176.

Winter Sun Lighting: A woman-owned business, established in 1993, that sells affordable bright lights in several different styles and configurations. Phone: (503) 233-1206 between 9 AM and 9 PM Pacific Daylight Time.

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