

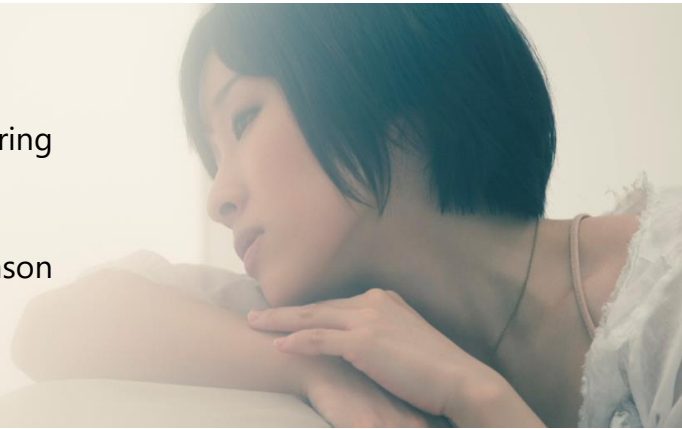
GETTING THROUGH THE DARK MONTHS

SEASONAL AFFECTIVE DISORDER

What is Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD)?

SAD is a mild to moderate form of depression that occurs during the fall and winter months.

- It is related to the shortening of daylight hours.
- It's cyclical, which means it appears each year as the season changes and goes away during the spring and summer.
- It is not the same as the *winter blues*.



The Symptoms of SAD



- Craving carb-heavy foods
- Incorrectly blaming yourself
- Difficulty doing easy or enjoyable activities
- Difficulty thinking and concentrating
- Feeling more lethargic
- Difficulty getting up when days are shorter
- Oversleeping

Risk Factors

- ⊗ Women (more than men)
- ⊗ People over 20 years old
- ⊗ Those with immediate family members affected
- ⊗ Those living in the more northern latitudes

The 3 Main Contributors

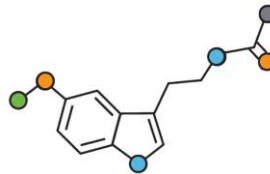
Circadian Rhythm

is your body's internal clock. Researchers believe that the winter's shorter days confuse your internal clock. Thus, your body has trouble regulating when to sleep and wake up.



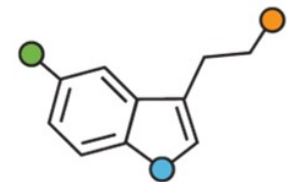
Melatonin

is a sleep-related hormone that your body makes at night. Light affects how much your body produces, so it can increase during winter months. This increase may lead to depression.



Serotonin

is a feel-good neurotransmitter in the brain. Less sunlight can lead to a drop in serotonin.



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Treating SAD with Diet and Exercise

Minimize Carbohydrate-Rich Foods

Our bodies like the feeling of high-sugar and high-carb food because they **boost serotonin levels** in the brain. Unfortunately, this can result in a crash later when the spike in your blood glucose levels falls. Keep your blood glucose levels stable by eating meals at regular times with snacks in between. Choose complex carbohydrates like whole-grain pasta, rice, and bread, along with fruits and vegetables. Try incorporating proteins rich in omega-3 like salmon.



Staying Active During the Winter

- 1 Go for walks during lunch or before work when there is still daylight.
- 2 Go to the gym straight from work rather than stopping at home first.
- 3 Start a winter sport like cross-country skiing or skating. Join a walking or running group.
- 4 Have an at-home activity to enjoy when the weather keeps you inside (e.g. workout video).

Other Ways to Treat SAD

Regulating Sleep

- Set a regular sleep schedule. Aim for 7 to 9 hours of sleep each night.
- Go to bed earlier, so you don't oversleep. Remember, increases in melatonin may lead to increased feelings of depression.

Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT)

- CBT addresses the way we think and act to impact how we feel.
- A therapist will foster behavioural skills and cognitive skills to counteract the lethargic moods associated with SAD.

Light Therapy

- Use a light box to replace daylight missing during the winter months.
- Therapy decreases melatonin and increases serotonin.
- Consistency is key with light therapy.

Medication

- Selective Serotonin Reuptake Inhibitors (SSRIs) are the preferred type of anti-depressants for severe SAD symptoms.
- Medication increases serotonin to lift moods, but can require 4-6 weeks of use to see results.

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