

GETTING THROUGH THE DARK MONTHS

TREATING SAD

The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence recommends that SAD be treated in the same way as other forms of depression. This may include regulating sleep, light therapy, cognitive behavioural therapy, and antidepressants.



Regulating Sleep

If you want to get the most sunshine out of your day, it's very important to be up during the daylight hours. Set a regular sleep schedule and go to bed earlier so you don't oversleep. Oversleeping and fluctuations in your sleep-wake routine can cause increases in melatonin levels, which can contribute to feelings of depression. Aim to sleep for 7 to 9 hours per night.

Light Therapy

Light therapy replaces missing daylight hours using an artificial light. This encourages your brain to reduce melatonin (which makes you sleepy) and increase serotonin (which heightens your mood). Research shows that light therapy relieves SAD symptoms for 70% of patients after a few weeks of treatment; however, there is no strong evidence to support its long-term benefits. Choose a light box medically proven to treat SAD and produced by a certified manufacturer.



Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT)

CBT is based on the notion that the way we think and behave can affect how we feel. Changing the way you think about and react to circumstances can help better manage SAD. CBT is a short-term approach that focuses on changing unhelpful behaviours, improving emotional regulation, and developing coping strategies that you can use while experiencing SAD.

Medication

Antidepressants are sometimes used to treat SAD when symptoms are severe. Selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs) are the preferred type of antidepressants for SAD. They work by increasing the serotonin levels in your brain, resulting in an uplifted mood. Be aware that it can take 4-6 weeks for medication to begin to work.



Sources: Armstrong, R. (2007). How to beat the winter blues. *The Independent*.
National Health Service Choices. 2013. Seasonal affective disorder – treatment. Retrieved from www.nhs.uk
National Institute of Health. 2013. Beat the winter blues: Shedding light on seasonal sadness.
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