



TIPS

for Dealing With Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD)

Approximately six in every 100 people experience seasonal affective disorder (SAD). SAD has been linked to a biochemical imbalance in the brain prompted by shorter daylight hours and a lack of sunlight during winter. With the plethora of information about this disorder, you can help lessen the effects of SAD.

Be aware of the risk factors. SAD can affect children, teens, and adults. SAD is more common in women than in men and often appears in young adulthood. The risk for developing SAD decreases as a person gets older.

Identify the signs. A handful of telltale signs indicate that you may have SAD. They include changes in mood, a decrease in time spent socializing, changes in eating habits, low energy, lack of enjoyment, changes in sleep patterns, and difficulty concentrating.

Be active with your treatment. If you feel that you have SAD, seek the help of a trained medical professional. SAD can be misdiagnosed as hypothyroidism, hypoglycemia, infectious mononucleosis, and other viral infections, so proper evaluation is necessary.

A well-balanced diet is key. Eating right will reduce your SAD symptoms. Avoiding simple carbohydrates and sugary snacks and consuming whole grains, vegetables, and fruits can help you feel better.

Go directly to the source. Increased exposure to natural light can improve symptoms of SAD. Take a long walk outside or arrange your home or office so that you are exposed to a window during the day.

Shed light on your situation. Phototherapy is another option for those who experience SAD. It involves sitting in front of a light box placed on a tabletop for a short period of time every day, usually in the morning. This light mimics outdoor light and causes a biochemical change in the brain that improves mood. Consult your doctor before beginning light therapy.

Talk it out. Talk therapy, or psychotherapy, also is used to treat SAD. Therapy may help identify and modify negative thoughts and behaviors or sources of stress that play a role in bringing about symptoms of SAD.

Keep a focus. SAD symptoms generally disappear during spring and summer. In fact, when spring returns and days become longer again, people with SAD return to their usual mood and energy level.

This page is part of an ongoing series of practical tips for patients with neurologic disorders. If you have compiled clinically relevant tips that you wish to share, please contact the editor at info@neurologyreviews.com.

Tips for Patients are available for download at www.neurologyreviews.com.

