



# Seasonal Affective Disorder (S.A.D.)

Seasonal Affective Disorder (S.A.D.) is a type of clinical depression which follows a seasonal pattern. Typical onset is in early winter with improvement in spring or early summer.

## What are the common symptoms of S.A.D.?

- Oversleeping (often an increase of 2-4 hours or more each day)
- Lethargy (low energy)
- Intense craving for carbohydrates
- Weight gain
- Withdrawal from social contacts
- Depressed mood

## What is light therapy?

Light therapy involves exposure to bright light under specific conditions. The light can be delivered through special lights or a light visor. Daily treatment sessions usually last from fifteen minutes to half an hour. Because light therapy may potentially damage the eye, it is best to purchase approved light therapy units.

## Is light therapy effective? Are there any side effects?

Light therapy has been found to have an anti-depressant effect in 70% of people with S.A.D. Most people find relief of their symptoms within two weeks of beginning light therapy.

A few mild side effects have been reported. These include but are not limited to, eyestrain, headaches, irritability, and

insomnia. Insomnia usually occurs if the treatment is taken too late in the day.

People should avoid self-diagnosis. There may be existing medical conditions that interfere with light treatment. Consult your doctor if you suffer from eye problems or if you are taking medication with photosensitivity as a side effect.

## Recommended reading

- **Canadian Consensus Guidelines For The Treatment of Seasonal Affective Disorder**, edited by Lam, Raymond W. and Levitt, Anthony J., Clinical and Academic Publishing, 1999.
- **Don't be SAD, Your guide to conquering Seasonal Affective Disorder**. Peters, Celeste A., Script Publishing Inc., 1994.
- **Winter Blues**. Rosenthal, Norman E., The Guilford Press, 1998.

## Recommended websites

- University of British Columbia S.A.D. information page [www.psychiatry.ubc.ca/mood/sad](http://www.psychiatry.ubc.ca/mood/sad)
- Internet Mental Health: Seasonal Affective Disorder [www.mentalhealth.com/book/p40-sad.html](http://www.mentalhealth.com/book/p40-sad.html)
- The society for light treatment and biological rhythms [www.sltr.org](http://www.sltr.org)

The Mood Disorders Association of Ontario provides support, information and education as a complement to traditional and alternative therapies. MDAO services are not intended as a replacement for other treatment options and encourages individuals to seek treatment by a qualified health professional.

### Mood Disorders Association of Ontario (MDAO)

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