



## **Seasonal Affective Disorder and Daylight Savings Time**

As we head into fall time and the days are becoming shorter, many individuals find themselves struggling with new or worsening depression symptoms. These symptoms may be due to Seasonal Affective Disorder, which is a type of Major Depressive Disorder that affects millions of adults (National Institute of Mental Health). Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD) causes serious mood and behavioral changes that can affect your day-to-day life, and it is important to get help if you find yourself struggling this time of year. For some individuals, depression symptoms can actually worsen during the warmer months and will get better as the weather gets cooler, although in most cases, individuals tend to struggle most in the colder months.

**Symptoms of Major Depressive Disorder and/or SAD can include the following:**

- **Feeling depressed most of the day, nearly every day**
- **Losing interest in activities you once enjoyed**
- **Experiencing changes in appetite or weight**
- **Having problems with sleep**
- **Feeling sluggish or agitated**
- **Having low energy**
- **Feeling hopeless or worthless**

- **Having difficulty concentrating**
- **Having frequent thoughts of death or suicide**

Many individuals with 'winter-pattern SAD' (depression that worsens in the wintertime and gets better in the spring and summer), can also experience hypersomnia, increased appetite and overeating, weight gain, and social isolation (National Institute of Mental Health).

SAD is often treated with a combination of medication, psychotherapy, vitamin D, and/or light therapy (National Institute of Mental Health). See below for a few tips for things you can do at home as well to improve your mood during the cold months:

1. **{Make it bright}**- Open the curtains, turn on an extra lamp or two, throw a new, brighter coat of paint on the walls. Make your space as light and comfortable as possible.
2. **{Make it a space you like}**- put a new picture or decoration up, light a candle, rearrange the furniture, put a nice, bright blanket on the couch- make it a space that's pleasant and enjoyable to be in.
3. **{Get a light box}**- Light boxes may help as well to reduce depressive symptoms; these provide a very bright light that you can sit in front of for about 30-45 minutes per day, in an effort to replace some of the lost daytime light during the fall and winter. Light box therapy was first studied in the 1980's and research conducted since that time has shown light therapy to be helpful for some individuals (Campbell et al, 2017).
4. **{Connect}**- It can feel very tempting to isolate or "hibernate" in the winter, but this can increase depression and feelings of sadness. It's important to try to reach out to someone, even just over a quick text or email, as a way to feel connected during the colder months.
5. **{Practice self-care}**- Don't forget to take care of yourself. Changing out of PJ's and taking a shower, even if you aren't leaving the house, can do wonders for your mood.
6. **{Find a hobby or something to do}**- watch a funny movie, find a crafting activity to do, color, do yoga or some kind of movement, read a book, journal, whatever you like!

With depression often comes loss of interest, fatigue, and low motivation, all which can make it hard to motivate yourself to do the above-mentioned things. If you find that you are struggling, don't be afraid to ASK FOR HELP! Call a friend, talk to someone you trust, or call your doctor or therapist! Talking with someone and getting support can help set you on a path toward feeling better and more like yourself during the winter months.

For more information regarding Seasonal Affective Disorder, including please visit the following website:

<https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/publications/seasonal-affective-disorder/index.shtml>.

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#### References:

Campbell, P. D., Miller, A. M., & Woesner, M. E. (2017). Bright Light Therapy: Seasonal Affective Disorder and Beyond. *The Einstein journal of biology and medicine : EJBM*, 32, E13–E25.

National Institute of Mental Health, T. N. (n.d.). Seasonal Affective Disorder. Retrieved from <https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/publications/seasonal-affective-disorder/index.shtml>