

Natural Treatments for Seasonal Affective Disorder

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It's that time of year when the leaves are changing and rain is more persistent in the Pacific Northwest. Some people long for these dark, gray days so they can cozy up with a cup of coffee and a good book. For others, this is a time of year that they struggle with depression.

Seasonal affective disorder (SAD) is defined as at least a two-year history of depression that is present from the winter until spring. Typical symptoms of SAD include:

- Low mood
- Irritability
- Sadness
- Carbohydrate cravings
- Lack of motivation
- Increased sleep needs
- Increased appetite
- Weight gain

Some patients with SAD are placed on anti-depressants, which can be helpful. For those who want to avoid medications there are many alternatives:

Lifestyle:

- **Keep a regular schedule** – Keep your sleep and wake times consistent from day to day and create structure into your work and home schedule.
- **Light Box** – Using a wide-spectrum light box that emits 10,000 lux 30 minutes per day in the morning can be effective for SAD.
- **Exercise** – Getting regular exercise can be just as effective for depressed mood as a pharmaceutical medication.

Diet:

- **Vitamin D** – Vitamin D can be helpful for SAD. Good sources are fish such as wild salmon, sardines (bonus if you eat the bones!), eggs and shitake mushrooms.
- **Protein** – Eating a source of protein with your meals keeps your blood sugar stable, which can help with overall mood. Adding nuts, seeds, yogurt, grass-fed meats and beans will keep your energy up.

Supplements:

- **Vitamin D, melatonin, and tryptophan** have all been shown to help with SAD. It is best to check with a naturopathic doctor (ND) before taking a new supplement to make sure it is right for you.

If you think you are experiencing symptoms of SAD, make sure that you are properly evaluated. Instead of feeling down this winter, make an appointment with a naturopathic doctor who can help you with specific lifestyle and supplement recommendations to keep the winter blues at bay!