



CIS

# Wellness Works

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## WITH LESS DAYLIGHT, YOU MAY BE AFFECTED BY SAD

When the clocks fall back in November, many of us start feeling fatigued or maybe even depressed. When people talk about having “the winter blues”, it’s actually a real thing, known as seasonal affective disorder (SAD). The disorder can strike year after year around the same time, beginning in the fall or winter and concluding in the spring when the days start getting longer.

Both the Regence and Kaiser websites suggest that SAD is brought on by people getting less sunlight during the fall and winter months. It’s believed that some brain hormones fluctuate with the diminishing sunshine and SAD is caused by these fluctuations.

“Because there’s less sunlight, our brains make less serotonin, which may affect our mood,” says CIS Wellness Benefits Representative Heather Matthews. “This can lead to fatigue, weight gain and feelings of sadness or depression.”

SAD typically affects more women than men, and can first strike individuals when they reach young adulthood.

### **I think I have SAD, what can I do?**

There are plenty of things you can do if you’re feeling depressed and think it may be SAD-related. Bright light therapy is normally the first thing that’s

#### Seasonal affective disorder (SAD) symptoms:

- Feeling anxious, sad or moody
- Feeling lethargic and tired
- Losing interest in routine activities and exercise
- Craving sleep
- Preferring solitude
- Having trouble concentrating
- Craving carbohydrates and overeating
- Gaining weight

Continued on next page



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*Continued from previous page*



*Phototherapy or light therapy, involves exposing the skin to ultraviolet light on a regular basis. The key to success is consistency.*

prescribed. The special lighting has 10 times the intensity of regular lighting. Most doctors will prescribe from 30 minutes to two hours of light exposure per day. You may start feeling like your old self within a week or two of therapy. However, you need to keep with it or your symptoms will return.

Another suggestion is to take vitamin D during the fall and winter and to listen to lively music that makes you want to dance. However, if none of these strategies are working — and you're still feeling depressed — you should talk to your doctor. In some cases, you may need a blood test to rule out other conditions, which mirror the symptoms of SAD (i.e. hypothyroidism).

Your doctor may also suggest that you get a mental health assessment, which can help determine how well you're reasoning, recalling and thinking. If the aforementioned treatments fail to provide you with some good relief, you may need medicine and counseling to improve your symptoms.

## How to Alleviate Symptoms

Walking, running, hiking, biking or swimming all are great activities to help combat SAD. Additionally, you should consider lifting weights, which can also make a difference. Exercising in the sunshine is another good strategy. Make sure to consult with your doctor before beginning any new exercise routine.

