

# Positive action for Seasonal Affective Disorder

People are like flowers. They bloom in the sunshine.

Feeling upbeat on a sunny day is just natural. And, when the overcast, darker and colder winter months come along, people's moods can be negatively affected. Especially older people.

This environmentally influenced depression, called Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD), is a medically recognized depression with symptoms that include feelings of hopelessness, lack of energy, loss of interest in regular activities, irritability, anxiety, restlessness and insomnia, inability to concentrate, and even thoughts of suicide. While everyone feels down occasionally, SAD is different because it can last for days or longer.

Depression is not all in the mind. Body chemistry plays a real role. When deprived of light, the body reacts by reducing levels of serotonin, a hormone that influences moods, and by increasing levels of melatonin, which helps regulate sleep. When the body's natural biorhythms and hormonal balances are thrown off, so can our sense of well-being.

What to do? There are common sense, non-medical actions anyone can employ to brighten their mood during the fall and winter.

- Actively taking in more natural light counters SAD-related hormonal changes, so going on walks or just going outside are helpful.
- Making the inside world more cheerful can include turning on more lights, opening blinds and curtains, adding indoor plants, applying a fresh coat of bright paint to walls and perhaps even trying what is marketed as "full-spectrum lighting."
- Eating nutritious foods with a focus on foods that support serotonin production is never a bad thing. These include carbohydrates like cereals and fruits like apples, pears, grapes, oranges and grapefruit.
- Exercise regularly. Aside from physical health benefits, exercise enhances a sense of well-being. Activity relieves stress and releases endorphins, the "happy hormones."
- Socialize as much as possible – sharing a photo or two on Facebook counts!

Spring for certain, and simple lifestyle changes, can make a difference for SAD sufferers.

There is no attempt in this article to dispense medical advice, and if SAD results in more severe depression, seeking the help of a medical professional can be appropriate.

