

# Topic of the Week

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WE CARE ABOUT YOUR HEALTH

## Winter No Wonderland When Feeling S.A.D

Presented by: Mark J. Glesener, D.C.

“You can’t get too much winter in the winter,” said Robert Frost. But some would disagree with the famed poet. At least half a million North Americans suffer from seasonal affective disorder (SAD). The onset of this disorder is usually autumn and winter, and the worst months for sufferers appear to be January and February. For SAD patients, even a short winter season can seem like an eternity.

SAD most often occurs in northern countries, where winters are usually harsher than those south of the equator.

It tends to first occur in young adulthood and affects younger women more than any other group - the reasons remain unclear. SAD is extremely rare in children and teens.

The disorder can be difficult to diagnose as symptoms are similar to hypothyroidism, hypoglycemia and mononucleosis.<sup>1</sup> SAD is not officially recognized as a distinct disorder. It’s often categorized as a subset of depression. But ask anyone who suffers from it, and he’ll tell you the symptoms are all too real - depression, lack of energy, fatigue, weight gain and high carbohydrate food cravings. Not everybody suffers the same symptoms, and the severity of symptoms can differ dramatically from one person to the next.

Science is perplexed as to what causes SAD and why it affects only some people.

The widely held theory is that the disorder is tied to a disruption in our body’s circadian rhythms – our biological clock that tells us when to wake and when to sleep. During winter, the late dawn and early sunsets can throw our circadian rhythms out of sync. Longer periods of darkness cause the body to produce the sleep hormone melatonin earlier in the day and at increased levels. Melatonin is a factor in other depressive syndromes, so it’s not surprising it’s linked with SAD.

Another natural substance that may play a role is serotonin, a neurotransmitter, which impacts mood. Insufficient sunlight can cause serotonin levels to dip.

A lack of vitamin D in your body may also spur SAD. Ultraviolet light from the sun sparks production of this vitamin. But reduced sunlight during winter may leave you at risk for months of vitamin D deficiency.



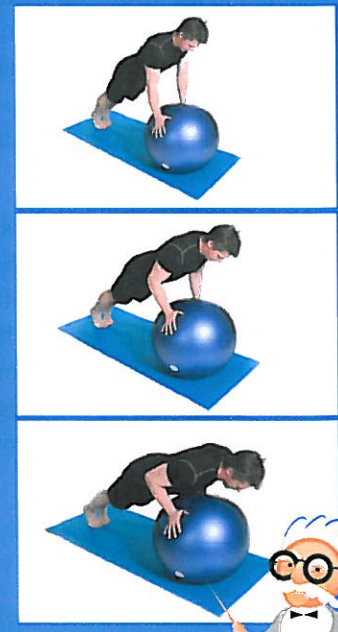
### Push Ups on Exercise Ball

Difficulty: Moderate to Advanced

*(Consult your chiropractor before engaging in this or any other exercise.)*

**Start:** Assume push-up position with hands on ball, fingers pointing toward floor. Hands should be positioned directly under shoulders and body should be in a straight line from ankles to ears.

**Exercise:** Keeping torso perfectly straight, slowly lower yourself to ball. Pause just before chest touches ball. If your upper body strength allows, push yourself back up to start position. If upper body strength is lacking, let chest come all way down to ball, then come off ball to return to start position. Repeat 5-15 times.



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A new theory about SAD was unveiled in 2008. Research at the University of Virginia uncovered a genetic mutation in the eye that may be a key culprit in seasonal affective disorder. The mutation seems to cause the eyes of a SAD patient to be less sensitive to light, and we know light impacts brain chemistry. While not everyone who's diagnosed with SAD has this mutation, the people with this genetic anomaly are five times more likely to develop the disorder. And nearly 30% of SAD patients come from families with a history of the disorder, suggesting a strong link to genetics.<sup>2</sup>

## Treatment Can be Hit and Miss

The treatments for SAD are varied, as not everyone responds the same way. Traditional medicine often recommends anti-depressant medications. But these drugs can take weeks to work and are often accompanied by irritating side effects.

Another option is to supplement with melatonin, which is available in most health food stores. However, taking melatonin in the wrong amount and/or at the wrong time of day may not be effective. Talk to your chiropractor before trying supplementation. Getting sufficient vitamin D may also help alleviate the effects of SAD.

A drug free option that works for many sufferers is a light box. Since we know that light influences the brain, the use of this tool makes sense. The patient sits near the light box for a short period of time - usually in the morning - to help elevate mood and synchronize her circadian rhythms.

If you decide to try light therapy, you should only buy a light box specifically designed for seasonal affective disorder. It should keep ultraviolet light to a minimum as it can damage your eyes and skin. Visit manufacturers' websites and review the specifications of the unit to ensure you're getting a safe product. You should be aware government health regulators have not endorsed this type of therapy for SAD.

## Simple Alternatives to Deal with SAD

Here are some other easy steps that can help you deal with seasonal affective disorder:

- Take a stroll outside during your lunch break to soak up sunlight.
- Keep blinds and curtains open.
- Arrange your office so you're close to a window.
- Practice good stress management techniques, such as meditation and regular exercise.
- Take a winter vacation to a sunny location.
- Get regular chiropractic adjustments - shown to help relieve depression.

And be sure to spend ample time with friends and family. A supportive social network is key to lifting your spirits. As author Victor Hugo said, "Laughter is the sun that drives winter from the human face."



## Quote of the Week

"Courage is very important. Like a muscle, it's strengthened by use."

- Ruth Gordon

For more health tips, visit online  
[www.citruspie.com](http://www.citruspie.com)



## References and Sources:

1. Seasonal Affective Disorder  
- *American Psychiatric Association*.
2. A missense variant (P10L) of the melanopsin (OPN4) gene in seasonal affective disorder  
- *Journal of Affective Disorders*, Volume 114, Issue 1, Pages 279-285



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