

Ask Jon Eakes

SAD -- Seasonal Affective Disorder -- it can be cured

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Feeling down, particularly in the Fall as the days get shorter? Sometimes it feels like the flu or it can even go to severe depression. This glum feeling in the Fall of every year has been tagged SAD or Seasonal Affective Disorder. It is attributed primarily to decreasing light exposure, but I would add in a special note about poor household air quality in the Fall. Karen Liberman of the Mood Disorders Association of Ontario, in Toronto points out that this is a rather common phenomena and for mild to moderate cases of SAD, there are effective treatments that consist of regular heavy exposure to special light sources -- essentially nourish our being with light when nature or our own indoor habits aren't doing the job. There now exist special light boxes and goggles as in the photo above, even centres where people can go to boost their light intake -- and it does cure many people if not simply help them out. There is one other aspect that needs to be considered. We may not realize it but the air quality in most of our homes is worse in the fall than any other time of the year. If you do not have a whole house ventilation system, you can have problems. We close up the house because it is getting cold outside. We turn on heating systems that tend to add pollutants that weren't there a week before. Humidity is high coming out of the summer and we probably have more mould in the house than any other time of the year. All of that combines with our slowing down and spending more time in our polluted house that has less light. Our bodies just start to shut down and there is not even enough snow outdoors to get us out to exercise. That is a pile of reasons to be SAD. If your home office is in this environment, you can expect your productivity to go down as well. What to do? Improve the LIGHTING in your house and you may not need the full scale light therapy, or if you do use the SAD lighting therapy your brighter environment will support that therapy. Full Spectrum light bulbs, skylights, light tubes, even full sized basement windows are all possibilities. Improve the ventilation in your house to minimize summertime humidity and keep a fresh air flow in your house all day every day all year long with an HRV. Make sure you don't have a MOULD problem in your house. Light quality and air quality together are the keys to avoiding becoming SAD.

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