

## YOUR HEALTH

# SEASONAL AFFECTIVE DISORDER (SAD)

Affecting two-thirds of Canadians, Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD) is triggered by short daylight hours and a lack of sun exposure and can leave sufferers in a serious slump.

In relation to lack of sunlight, SAD has been linked to Vitamin D deficiency. Studies show that the majority of Canadians don't get enough vitamin D, the sunshine vitamin, during the winter. Vitamin D deficiency disrupts the circadian rhythm (internal 24-hour clock), causing an overproduction of melatonin during the day. Melatonin, normally only produced at night, causes feelings of sleepiness. Without a regular circadian rhythm, people are vulnerable to fatigue and depressed mood.

Several European and Canadian studies have linked fish oil (omega-3 fatty acid) consumption to lower rates of depression.

Deficiencies in omega-3 fats are common in people suffering from the winter blues. In order to nourish the brain and improve mood, you may need to increase your intake of fatty fish, as well as take a good quality sustainable fish oil supplement.

Perhaps the best treatment for depression is exercise. Often during the winter months Canadians don't get adequate physical activity, which can contribute to SAD. Since exercise has a profoundly positive effect on neurotransmitters and hormones, it is a crucial component of mood disorder treatment. Aim for at least 30 minutes of physical activity most days of the week.

*For more information on treating Seasonal Affective Disorder, contact your naturopathic doctor.*

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