

Melancholy Babe

Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD): More than just a bummer.

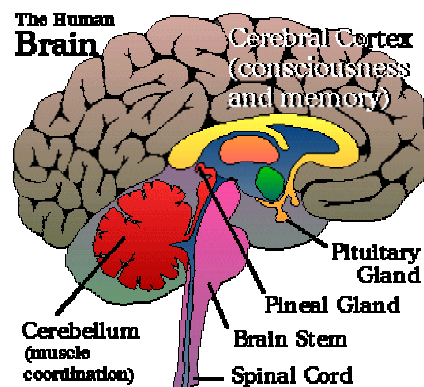


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In the depths of winter, we go to work it's dark and when we leave work it's dark...and in between it's often cold and rainy or snowy. For thousands of people, Winter is a time to dread because they suffer from Seasonal Affective Disorder. The symptoms of SAD are depression, fatigue, irritability, feeling withdrawn, a tendency to overeat, sleep excessively, and decreased sex drive.¹ In the Summer, these same people feel happy, energetic, and active.¹

What goes wrong? If you think you have SAD, this is a clear case where it's definitely not "all in your head". Your body's internal clock, the circadian system, is regulated by the pineal gland. The pineal gland is located at the base of the brain and has been called the Third Eye since ancient times. This gland is controlled by the presence or absence of external light. Melatonin is secreted at night by the pineal gland to set and maintain the internal clock. Short days, irregular or long work hours, and travel between time zones upset the synchronization of this gland and coordination of the body's natural rhythms and functions.¹



Depression and inflammation. Besides being very difficult to tolerate, depression is linked to increased risk of heart disease, type-2 diabetes mellitus, osteoporosis, certain cancers, periodontal disease, arthritis, Crohn's disease, Alzheimer's disease, frailty, and aging.^{3,4,5,6}

Recently, several studies have found that even moderate depression results in a prolonged elevation of interleukin-6 (IL-6), the key element in the body's response to disease or injury.^{7,8,9} Certain cells are stimulated to produce the molecule IL-6 which attaches to white blood cells. This encourages an immune response, causing the white blood cells to produce antibodies and proteins, and triggering inflammation. Inflammation is one of the body's immune responses. What the studies have found is that people with mild to severe depression exhibit significantly elevated levels of IL-6 over a prolonged period which in turn causes a long-term inflammatory response. Chronic inflammation is the likely source of the many health problems associated with depression. And chronic inflammation is a serious problem if you are suffering from Repetitive Strain Injury (RSI).

Treatment. If you are feeling the symptoms of SAD, it behooves you to remedy your blues, especially if you have inflammation due to RSI or if you are predisposed to one of the many conditions exacerbated by

depression. You truly are hurting yourself by feeling melancholy. Thankfully, there are some simple things that can change this.

- *Full spectrum light.* Increasing your exposure to full spectrum lighting can probably do more than anything else. Either replace bulbs in your current fixtures with full spectrum bulbs or purchase a special light box that mimics sunlight.^{1,2} Sit about 18" from the light keeping your head and eyes toward the light while reading or doing other tasks. Early morning sessions from 15 minutes to 2 hours can bring improvement within a week.^{1,2} Another option is to exercise outdoors in the middle of the day and face the sky every now and then.
- *St. John's Wort (Hypericum perforatum).* Use of this herb has long been used in folk medicine to treat depression. It has now been shown through clinical trials to be a useful antidepressant.^{1,2} Hypericum treatments lower the amount of light necessary to obtain a therapeutic effect, making normal daylight as effective as intensive light therapy when incorporated with St. John's Wort treatments. (Note: Adverse effects of St. John's Wort have been reported as sensitivity to sunlight. These were concerning grazing animals, especially sheep, which eat large amounts of the plant. It may be that sheep process St. John's Wort differently than humans, or that they are consuming such massive quantities that they have an adverse reaction. Humans taking a normal dose of St. John's Wort have rarely reported such problems.²)
- *Prozac and Zoloft.* These antidepressants are often used with good results.² There is hope that a current study of the IL-6 receptor will lead to the development of a drug that will block the receptor and reduce the immune response. Clearly it will be a while before such a drug can be developed, tested, and marketed, but it could relieve the symptoms of SAD and the dangers of cardiovascular disease and arthritis.
- *Supplements.*
 - *Melatonin.* Although taking melatonin supplements may be useful for jet lag and other sleep disturbances, it may actually exacerbate SAD and other types of depression by prolonging the nocturnal melatonin rise. The long term effects of taking melatonin on the circadian rhythm are not yet understood.
 - *Brain serotonin* levels are increased by Melatonin. Support of serotonin via nutrients can elevate mood, reduce aggression, increase pain threshold, reduce anxiety, and relieve insomnia.¹
 - *Folic acid, B12, and other B vitamins* are not fully understood, but are responsible for anti-depressive effects. Low levels of B vitamins in general are associated with depression and behavioral changes, so a multivitamin containing high dose of all B vitamins should be considered.
- *Other Factors.*
 - *Nutrient deficiency or excess, drugs* (including prescription, illicit, alcohol, caffeine, nicotine), hypoglycemia, aspartame (e.g., Nutrasweet) consumption, hormonal imbalances, allergies, and environmental and microbial factors can exacerbate the symptoms of SAD and should be addressed.
 - Recent research has found that an extremely high level of *fluoride* accumulates in the pineal gland, even more than in bones. Animals treated with high levels of fluoride were found to have lower melatonin production than animals treated with low levels of fluoride. It is not

known what the interference is exactly, but use of fluoride may be problematic for people susceptible to SAD.

Resources:

Light for Health - <http://www.lightforhealth.com/store/index.cfm> - Light Boxes, spiral lights, tubes, etc.

Shop Natural - <http://www.shopnatural.com/Merchant2/merchant.mvc?> - Full spectrum bulbs

NOSAD, The National Organization for Seasonal Affective Disorder support group for sufferers of SAD.
P.O. Box 451, Vienna, VA 22180

This article and all of our articles are intended for your information and education. We are not experts in the diagnosis and treatment of specific medical or mental problems. When dealing with a severe problem, please consult with a healthcare or mental health professional and research the alternatives available for your particular diagnosis prior to embarking on a treatment plan. You are ultimately responsible for your own health and treatment!

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