

# Does the change of seasons make you SAD?

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Correspondent

Many of us are sad to see the summer sun waning, but for sufferers of seasonal affective disorder (SAD), the transition into winter is much harder.

Unlike typical depression, whose symptoms can strike at any time, the mood changes of SAD reoccur at the same time each year, most typically with an onset in the fall or winter months, less commonly in spring or early summer.

Common symptoms include oversleeping, fatigue, irritability, low mood, and changes in appetite and weight. Although the exact cause of the disorder is unknown, several theories are tied to the low light of the season. Serotonin — one of our “feel-good” neurotransmitters — is at its lowest midwinter and the low mood may be a result of the low serotonin. With the decrease in daily light we also see a disruption in the body’s melatonin levels, another regulator of sleep patterns and mood.

If you have SAD, think of taking action before your annual onset of symptoms.

Full-spectrum light boxes are a first line of therapy for SAD. Many sufferers can gain relief in as little as two weeks using light therapy. Using the light box in the first two hours after waking is the optimal time for decreasing melatonin, our drowsy neurotransmitter, so that we feel alert. Though helpful to many, people diagnosed with bipolar disorder should avoid this therapy.

**Be aware of negative thought patterns that increase depression. In our productive society, negative self-talk can result when we are not functioning at our highest level.**

Exercise is one of the most powerful treatments to improve mood and decrease stress. One hour of outdoor aerobic exercise has been shown to be as beneficial as 2.5 hours of light therapy.

Avoid substances and behaviors that can worsen the condition. Alcohol is

a depressant. SAD often increases the appetite for carbohydrate-laden food; and if sugary processed carbs are chosen, blood sugar crashes will worsen mood and fatigue. Whole-grain carbohydrates eaten with protein and good fats are a better choice. Oversleeping can further disrupt melatonin production. An uneven sleep schedule can cause tiredness at the wrong time of day. Adhering to a steady sleep/wake schedule is a better choice.

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thought patterns that increase depression. In our productive society, negative self-talk can result when we are not functioning at our highest level. Winter was often a time of rest for our ancestors; now the lowest level of annual light can be at our busiest time of the year. Have reliable times for rest. If possible, schedule a warm and sunny vacation to cope with the energy changes winter can bring. Consider talking with a therapist to work through recurring negative thoughts.

Whatever the cause, SAD can become quite serious. Definitely seek a doctor’s help if mood changes are accompanied by suicidal thoughts, difficulty functioning at work or school, social withdrawal or substance use. Underlying causes of depression like hypothyroid and vitamin deficiencies should be ruled out. Antidepressant medication may be needed if symptoms are serious or don’t respond to gentler interventions. And remember, it’s darkest just before the return of the light.

## Hitting the track for their school...



PHOTO BY JERRY BALDOCK

Sisters Christian Academy students hit the track at Reed Stadium for their annual fundraising jog-a-thon last week.

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## Your Care

Your Care has built a skilled team of professionals to offer accessible, exceptional medical care to our Central Oregon community.

Eric Wattenburg, MD is the owner and medical director of Your Care.

Phillip Burrer, MD has recently joined the Your Care team seeing our walk-in/same-day medical care patients as well as our patients with occupational medicine workers comp scheduled appointments.

Anita Henderson, MD chose family medicine as her specialty because it seemed to offer the best opportunity for treating the whole patient. She approaches wellness and illness from a holistic perspective, and works to include the patient’s family as an integral part of the care plan.



Lisa Steffey, DO focuses on urgent care and occupational medicine. She has additional certification in the area of workers compensation.

Tricia Couture, FNP has been practicing in Oregon for 14 years, the past seven of which have been in Central Oregon. She enjoys caring for people of all ages, but has particular passion for adolescents and student athletes.