

Seasonal Affective Disorder: Can Light Therapy Help?

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If during the winter months you have a hard time waking up in the morning, experience a lack of energy, poor concentration, and tiredness you may be experiencing Seasonal Affective Disorder. Seasonal affective disorder is a subtype of major depression that affects a half a million people in the United States that usually starts in the fall and winter as the days grow shorter, and ends in the spring [1].

What causes SAD? The cause is unknown, but it is thought to be brought on by the changes in amount of sunlight because the days are shorter, as well as sleep patterns and hormones. Exposure to light can reset the biological clock and is cheaper than a tropical vacation.

Symptoms of SAD include a loss of interest in favorite activities, sluggishness, irritability, fatigue, increased need for sleep, mood swings and weight gain [2].

If you struggle with symptoms of SAD, maybe it's time to try one of those light therapy contraptions that have grown in popularity to add to your wellness routine. These are used to supplement daylight triggering the brain to produce serotonin thus reducing depressive symptoms. While it is important to still get outside, sticking to a fitness routine and eating healthy helps to balance your hormone levels which often become disrupted when we are exposed to less sunlight. It is best to engage in light therapy within the first 30 minutes to 4 hours of waking up, and NOT before you go to bed, as it can keep you up.

These are not any ordinary lamps, they are very bright- most of the popular lamps on the market deliver about 10,000 lux, which is 20 times brighter than regular indoor lighting [3]. Dr. Norman Rosenthal, a psychiatrist, pioneered the treatment in 1980. These lamps are also known to adjust circadian rhythms per Mayo Clinic.

Sizes and prices of the lamps range. For example, the Veralux Happy Light Portable packs flat and sits on your desk (\$40, [verilux.com/products/happylight-liberty-5k-natural-spectrum-energy-lamp](https://www.verilux.com/products/happylight-liberty-5k-natural-spectrum-energy-lamp)). Northern light technology flamingo carries one of the best floor lamps, you can put it near your bed or couch (\$200, [northernlighttechnologies.com](https://www.northernlighttechnologies.com)). For a lamp that is adjustable, sleek, and seen on Shark Tank the Circadian Optics Lumos 2.0 might be for you (\$40, [Amazon](https://www.amazon.com)).

References

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