

What is Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD)?

As winter approaches and the days get shorter, many people suffer with a form of depression called seasonal affective disorder (SAD). Although SAD isn't totally understood, it is a real illness with real symptoms that vary in frequency and intensity. Symptoms can include:

- **Sleep Problems** – Desire to oversleep, disturbed sleep or difficult staying awake
- **Lethargy** – A feeling of fatigue and inability to carry out normal routines
- **Overeating** – Craving sugary or starchy foods
- **Social Problems** – Irritability and desire to avoid social situations
- **Anxiety** – Tension and inability to tolerate stress
- **Loss of Libido** – Decreased interest in sex or physical contact
- **Mood Changes** – Extremes in mood and/or short periods of hypomania

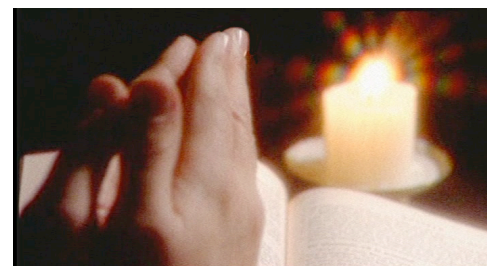
One of the most effective treatments is light exposure. For mild symptoms, spending time outside and a good brisk walk may be enough. For more severe symptoms a light treatment called phototherapy may be helpful as it suppresses the brain's secretion of melatonin. People who think they may have SAD or any mental health issue should discuss their symptoms with a mental health professional.

How Faith Communities Can Respond

During the darkest nights of the winter, many faith traditions celebrate religious holidays. With SAD, as with all chronic mental illnesses and normal holiday stress, our faith communities can be intentional about finding ways to encourage a healthy winter holiday season that focuses on our faith, our families and our friends.

Christians celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ who will become the "light of the world." The eight day Jewish celebration of Hanukkah is known as the *Festival of Light*. It reminds people of the miracle that re-kindled the Temple menorah light at a time of darkness and despair.

People living with SAD do not need to remain in the dark. SAD is a real and common disorder that can be effectively treated.



The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light;
on those who lived in a land of deep shadow a light has shone.
-Isaiah 9:2