
LIFE HEALTH

Natural remedies can lighten the sadness



By Melissa Carr, Special to 24 hours
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Light therapy is used to combat SAD. (QMI AGENCY)

The dark days of fall are here and for many that means more than just a bit of struggle getting up before dawn and grouchiness about another dark, rainy day. Seasonal affective disorder is aptly named because it's a type of depression that is related to a change in season. Though SAD can occur at any seasonal transition time, it most commonly starts in the fall and lasts through the winter months.

Most SAD symptoms are the same as other types of depression — feeling hopeless, low energy, problems concentrating, feeling irritated, insomnia or oversleeping, changes in weight or appetite, loss of interest in things that were once enjoyed, and frequent thoughts of death or suicide. Of course, it's normal to feel low occasionally, but when these symptoms are ongoing and affect daily living, it's time to seek help.

For fall/winter SAD, fewer hours of sunlight exposure may disrupt the body’s internal clock. Less sun time means less vitamin D, and low vitamin D levels in the blood have been associated with SAD and some other types of depression. In addition, the body’s natural production of the hormone melatonin and the brain chemical serotonin can also be altered by darker days, and these too may be associated with SAD.

One of the most common natural remedies for treating SAD is light therapy, also called phototherapy. Phototherapy uses light boxes that produce about 25 times more light than a normal living room light. Most people use these light boxes for about 30 minutes every morning.

Vitamin D and omega 3 essential fatty acids are common basic supplements often prescribed to treat SAD, but traditional Chinese medicine goes deeper to assess each individual’s own unique patterns of imbalance. Someone who is irritable and agitated and suffers from insomnia might benefit from an herbal combination that includes the “Tree of Happiness” herb, he huan pi. Another, who is oversleeping but exhausted, and getting sick often, may be prescribed a formula that contains astragalus and ginseng.

Acupuncture can also help treat SAD and other forms of depression. In a 2013 study, Acupuncture and Counselling for Depression in Primary Care: A Randomized Controlled Trial, the researchers found both acupuncture and counseling to be associated with “significantly reduced depression at three months when compared to usual care alone.”

For those struggling with the darkness of SAD, there are natural solutions.

Dr. Melissa Carr is a registered doctor of traditional Chinese medicine, caring for patients in an integrative medicine clinic in Vancouver.

Poll

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Thursday, November 27, 2014

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- ☐ No

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