



Department of Psychiatry

C O L U M B I A U N I V E R S I T Y M E D I C A L C E N T E R

A Brighter Outlook for SAD Patients

(November 10, 2008) Like many, I wrestle with the often unrecognized and sometimes debilitating seasonal affective disorder, also known as SAD. Recurring depression is the most prominent symptom of SAD. In most cases, a fall or winter seasonal onset is followed by a spontaneous springtime remission. The good news is that recent studies have indicated that cognitive behavioral therapy is a promising approach to dealing with SAD. The approach uses a limited number of therapy sessions to help patients develop skills to adjust their thinking. It can be combined with a disciplined routine of daily natural light therapy, regular therapy sessions, and even daily doses of prescribed anti-depressants. And, yes, rigorous exercise and a healthy diet remain essential to the treatment.

Light therapy is [also] an effective way to stave off the effects of seasonal effective disorder. A basic light box costs about \$100 to \$300 and works best if used daily, for at least 30 minutes. The model I use, the NatureBright SunTouch Plus Ion/Light SAD Therapy (\$129, Walgreens), emits negative ions. Studies at Columbia University and the New York State Psychiatric Institute have demonstrated that high-density negative ionizers can act as an antidepressant for patients with SAD and the positive effect is like that of antidepressant medication.



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