

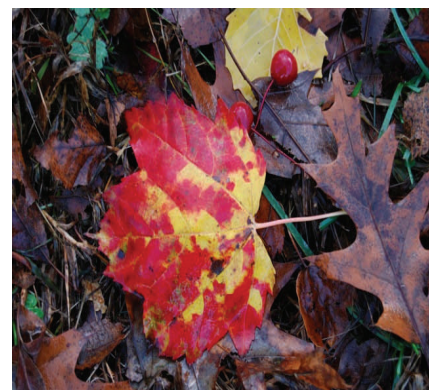
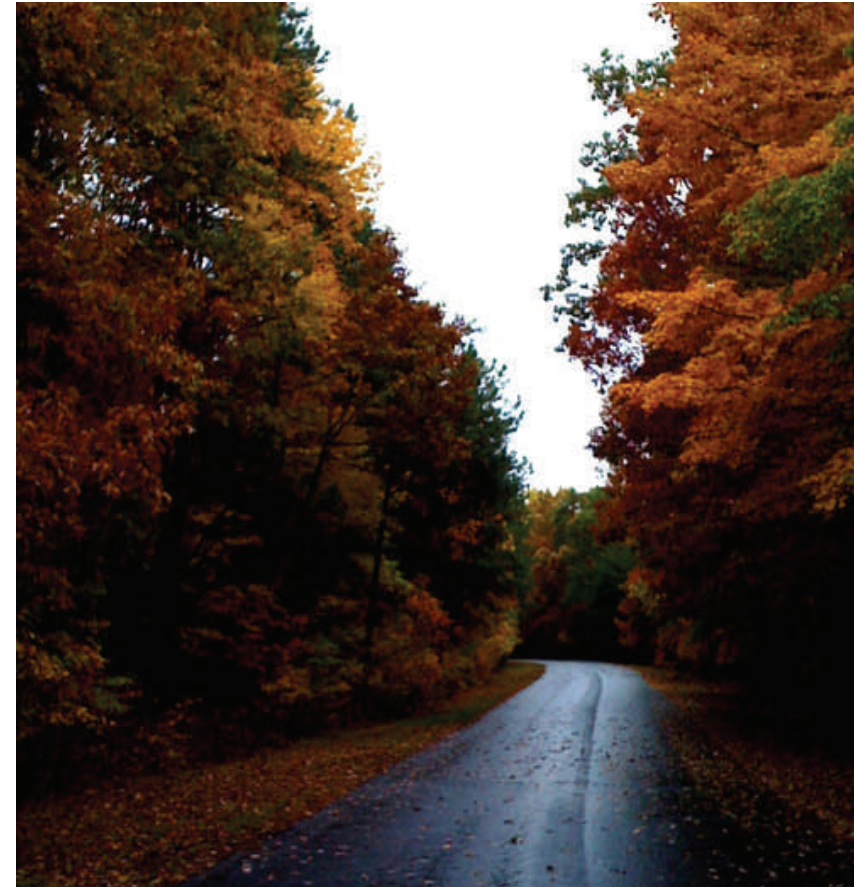
Fall is officially here and Winter is right on its curtails. We all know this time of year well; the smell of ever burning fires is prevalent, the leaves quickly change and then make their way to the ground, and the sky seems to be constantly covered in a blanket of gray. Well, as much as we all enjoy the arrival of ski season and the holidays, the lack of sun light and increasingly cold temperatures can often cause glum days for many. This is often diagnosed as seasonal affective disorder. Aside from cold temperatures and decreases in sunlight, other factors contributing to seasonal affective disorder (SAD) may include genetics, age, and increased stress levels from the holiday season.

Many of these symptoms are due to poor regulation of neurochemicals that are involved in the regulation of our general mood and daily functioning. Melatonin seems to be the leading culprit in cases of SAD. Melatonin is a hormone that our brains produce during the hours of darkness. It is involved with the regulation of sleep, body temperature and release of other important hormones.

People with SAD tend to produce too much melatonin, usually onset by less and less daylight. This disrupts our internal body clock leading to depressive symptoms. Add to that the stress of the holiday season, lack of beta carotene usually taken in from sun exposure, decreased exercise levels and general activity, and you can easily find yourself suffering from SAD. If you have had episodes of depression that clearly have an onset in fall or winter followed by remission of symptoms in the spring or summer, you may have SAD.

Some symptoms of winter-onset seasonal affective disorder include:

- Depressed mood
- Irritability
- Hopelessness
- Anxiety
- Loss of energy
- Social withdrawal
- Oversleeping (feeling like you want to hibernate)
- Loss of interest in activities you normally enjoy
- Appetite changes, especially a craving for foods high in carbohydrates such as pastas, rice, bread and cereal
- Weight gain
- Difficulty concentrating and processing information



SAD can be treated via a number of interventions ranging from psychotherapy and pharmacological treatment to light therapy (phototherapy). Other solutions for treating SAD include increased exercise levels to help depress melatonin levels and increase the circulation of positive hormones, such as the endorphins released during and after exercise. Try to get outside as much as possible regardless of the weather, sometimes just being out and about immersed in nature can help boost your mood. You can also help yourself by eating a healthy and balanced diet rich in phytochemicals, antioxidants, vitamin E, C, D, and beta carotene. Just like any other time of the year, you should surround yourselves with “happy” things such as friends, family, cheerful music, and occasions. You should also try to limit alcohol intake and get restful sleep to ensure there aren’t other factors bringing down your mood.

As always, you should speak with your health care provider if you think you may have SAD. Treatment beyond these helpful tips, such as light therapy, is available and SAD should not be taken lightly. Just be sure to treat SAD, so you can enjoy what should be a beautiful and joyous time of year!