



Dr. Drew Sinatra: Hey folks, Dr. Drew Sinatra, here. For today's **Wellness Wisdom** segment, I'm going to be talking about seasonal affective disorder, also known as SAD. Now, many of you watching and listening to this may be familiar with this illness. It's really a condition where people begin to feel depressed during the fall and winter months. And this happens for many reasons, one of which is because we're not getting enough light exposure. It's also when it's snowing out, and it's raining out more.

And this can be a condition that can affect people on many levels, right? We can feel a depressed mood — where we feel depressed, we feel sad, we might feel anxious, we might feel angry. It can also affect our sleep, or sleeping longer hours at night. We may begin to crave carbohydrates and sugar, because we're feeling so low in our energy, and we feel like we need a little bit of a boost. We might find that we're losing and lacking pleasure and motivation in certain things.

And you know, for some, there can be an easy way out of this. And I'm going to talk about my five top tips for getting people out of seasonal affective disorder, or at least helping with it. But for some, this can be a pretty serious condition where they might need to seek some medical help.

Now, my top five tips for treating SAD, or seasonal affective disorder, is this — number one is a light box. Now right here, I've got this Verilux light box. It's a 10,000 lux unit, and what I do is I sit about 16 to 24 inches from it. It's at an angle — you don't want to look at this light directly, but you want to have it at an angle on your desk, somewhere in the morning, looking at your computer, reading a newspaper, or doing whatever you do. And you want to basically just look forward, and for around 20 to 60 minutes, have this light on. And research has shown that when people use these light boxes, it can really help with the symptoms associated with SAD.

Now, my number two recommendation is to exercise. And this may be exercise in the morning, depending on if you have time in the morning, maybe in the afternoon — and maybe indoors versus outdoors. Regardless of when or how you do it, getting some daily exercise is going to be really key here, because you need to get your body moving. And studies have shown that exercise can actually be more beneficial than certain antidepressants in helping with depression.

My third recommendation is vitamin D. This is something that you may not read about online for treatments of seasonal affective disorder, but it's something that I've personally used in the past, and I've used with my patients that I've found to be very helpful for getting through this difficult time during the fall and



winter season. And as a safe amount to take, I recommend 5,000 IUs, or units, per day. And you can always take a little bit of a higher dose if you're working with a health professional, where you're measuring your vitamin D level and you're measuring your calcium level. But generally speaking, 5,000 units a day can be really helpful during these winter months to help people get through this.

My fourth recommendation is to get out into nature more. And I can tell you this, in the last week, it was just pouring here. It was just pouring for an entire week...and I remember I went outside, I got into the woods, and everything was just bright green, it was beautiful. And so getting out into nature is going to help you with these feelings of, you know, down and just feeling lethargy in your body. Because you're going to smell the fresh air, you're going to connect with nature, you're going to feel alive again out there. And so that's a really critical piece here, is to get out into nature every single day.

Now my last and fifth recommendation is a healthy diet. And I say this because what can happen during these fall and winter months when you're experiencing SAD, is to reach for the carbohydrates and the sugar. I think we've all done it before, and it's a nasty habit to get in because you start to feel tired and you reach for something that has sugar in it, or it's a highly processed carbohydrate. You eat that food, you feel high for a little bit, and then you start to feel down again. And what we want to do is really break that cycle, and so I always recommend more protein during this time and more healthy fats. For example, omega-3 fatty acids, which you may get from cold water fish, or eating more walnuts, or flax seeds, for example. And omega-3s have been shown to help boost mood, as well.

So those are my five top tips for treating seasonal affective disorder. Again, if you've got a mild or to moderate condition, this will likely help you, doing these things. If you've got a more severe SAD condition, then you may want to seek medical help, because this can be something that can really, really affect people. Including ideations of suicide, which are not good, of course. So you always want to seek medical help when you start to feel that bad.

All right, I hope this helps. And yeah, these are things that I do during the winter to get me through this and they always help. All right, talk to you soon.