

# Suicide Prevention at Lake Tahoe: Combating seasonal affective disorder (SAD)

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Suicide Prevention



Light therapy incorporates light boxes, visors or lamps with the purpose of exposing the individual to light.  
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## SUICIDE RESOURCES

**Nevada County Crisis Line:** 530-265-5811

**Washoe County Crisis Line:** 775-784-8090

**Suicide Prevention Lifeline:** 530-885-2300

### Access to Mental Health Services:

**Placer County, Adult:** 530-581-4054

**Placer County, Children:** 1-866-293-1940

**Washoe County, Children:** 775-325-7902

**Nevada County:** Adult and Children 530-582-7803

**More online:** Find a directory of local therapy services at <http://www.tfhd.com>, under Quick Links.

Seasonal affective disorder (SAD), also known as the winter blues, is a type of depression that impacts many people with the change of seasons.

Reduced sunlight and warmth can make the winter months difficult, leaving some to feel irritable, tired and melancholy. SAD symptoms slowly build in late fall and winter months, as the days grow shorter.

For those who are susceptible, onset often begins in the late teen years or adulthood and occurs more often in women than men. SAD can occasionally become long-term depression.

Although there is no specific diagnostic test for SAD, symptoms are often similar to other types of depression, including social withdrawal, hopelessness, increased sleep, increased appetite and weight gain, unhappiness and feeling irritable.

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A variety of health professionals can be qualified to evaluate and treat seasonal affective disorders including your primary care physician, physician assistants, nurse practitioners or therapists.

#### Causes and risk factors of seasonal affective disorder

Seasonal affective disorder appears to develop from inadequate exposure to bright light in the winter months. Studies have shown that bright light changes the chemicals in the brain. Low levels of vitamin D in the blood, high levels of melatonin and low levels of serotonin in the brain are factors associated with a higher occurrence of seasonal affective disorder and other depression. The details of how this occurs are still being studied.

#### Treatments

Treatments for SAD are similar to that of depression and may include light therapy, talk therapy, and anti-depressant medication.

#### Light therapy

One of the most effective treatments for SAD is light therapy sometimes called phototherapy. Light therapy incorporates light boxes, visors or lamps with the purpose of exposing the individual to light.

Similar to exposure to natural light, the effects of light therapy trigger chemicals in your brain which help regulate mood.

It is important to insure that the device filters out harmful ultraviolet light. Most forms of light therapy involve sitting by a light box for 15 minutes to over an hour a day.

#### Therapy or counseling

Counseling or talk therapy involves talking with a trained professional about your worries, problems and experiences in the past. The aim of the session is to identify whether something from your past is affecting how you feel today.

Cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) is another option for treating SAD. With CBT a therapist works with the client to identify and understand their thought processes that may be creating obstacles to improving their mood.

When obstacles are identified and addressed, it increases ones ability to alleviate symptoms.

#### Home remedies

Stick to a regular exercise routine or go for a walk outside while the sun is high. Get outdoors as often as possible and when indoors sit by a window if you can.

Maintain healthy eating habits with a diet that is high in lean proteins, fruits, vegetables, and complex carbohydrates and decrease your intake refined sugars and alcohol.

Try to limit sleep to 8 hours a night. Over sleeping, inconsistent sleep schedules and fluctuations in your sleep-wake cycle can cause an increase in melatonin during sleep which can contribute to feelings of depression.

If possible, plan a vacation to a warm climate.

#### Medication

Antidepressants can be prescribed to treat depression and some severe cases of seasonal affective disorder. Consult your health care provider to identify if this is a helpful option for you.

If you have thoughts about hurting yourself or anyone else, seek medical attention right away or contact Lifeline directly at 1-800-273-TALK (8255) or local law enforcement.

For more information about the Tahoe Truckee Suicide Prevention Coalition visit <http://www.tahoelifeline.org> 

*Lisa Stekert is the coordinator for the Tahoe Truckee Suicide Prevention Coalition and Outreach Coordinator for the Tahoe Truckee Prevention Task Force. Contact her at [lstekert@tfhd.com](mailto:lstekert@tfhd.com)  or by calling 530-550-6733.*

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