

Light Therapy Devices for SAD

Seasonal affective disorder (SAD) is a type of clinical depression that regularly occurs in the winter, with normal mood in the summer. Light therapy is an effective and safe treatment for SAD. Other treatments for depression (for example, antidepressant medications) are also effective. Self-diagnosis or self-treatment of SAD is not recommended because there are other medical causes for depressive symptoms, and because light therapy may be harmful to people with certain medical conditions (for example, eye disease). See your doctor first!

Although light therapy is effective for SAD, we still do not fully understand how the light works and what is the best method for light therapy. There are now many light therapy devices available on the market making claims about light treatment, but light therapy devices are not well regulated in Canada. Therefore, we believe it is wise to be cautious about recommending light therapy devices. Our recommendations are based on the following principles: 1) the light device should be tested and found effective in scientifically valid studies, 2) the light device should have a filter that blocks harmful ultraviolet rays, 3) the light device should be CSA approved if used in Canada (UL approved in the US), and 4) the light device company should have a track record of reliability.

We recommend fluorescent light boxes because they have been extensively tested with the greatest evidence for effectiveness in scientific studies, and we have experience with these devices. Other light devices, for example, light emitting diode (LED) devices, light visors and dawn simulators, may be beneficial for some patients but there is less evidence for effectiveness compared to light boxes.

Most light devices use white light. We do NOT recommend narrow-band blue-light devices because they have not been extensively tested, there is no indication that blue light is better than white light for SAD, and there is no information on long term safety (unlike white light devices). There are some theoretical reasons why blue light may be harmful to the eyes.

We have no direct financial interest in any companies listed below, nor can we take any responsibility for their products.

British Columbia Suppliers

Shoppers Drug Mart carries a range of light devices. www.shoppersdrugmart.ca

Clinical Sleep Solutions,
www.clinicalsleep.com

Vancouver and other cities
Tel: 1-866-432-9271

VitalAire, www.vitalaire.com

Unit 201-9087B-198th Street
Langley, BC V1M 3B1
Tel: (604) 881-0214

Canadian Direct-Order Suppliers

Up-Lift Technologies, Halifax, NS

www.day-lights.com

Tel: (902) 422-0804 / 1-800-387-0896

Northern Light Technologies, St. Laurent PQ

www.northernlight-tech.com

Tel: 514-335-1763 / 1-800-263-0066

Litebook Company, Medicine Hat, AB

www.litebook.com

Tel: 1-877-723-5483

Bio-Brite Inc., Bethesda, MD (CSA approved)

www.biobrite.com

Tel: 1-301-961-5943

International Direct-Order Suppliers

Circadian Lighting Association

www.claorg.org