

Don't be SAD

People who suffer from Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD) can brighten up their environment using a special lightbox.

George Cole spotlights what's on the market



IT'S THE time of the year when the nights are drawing in and the prospect of dark mornings is coming ever closer. Many of us find that the decreasing daylight hours at this time of the year dampen our spirits, but for a sizeable minority, the long, dark, winter months can trigger a condition known as Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD).

SAD is form of depression, thought to affect around seven per cent of the UK population (gardener Monty Don is a well-known sufferer). A milder version, known as the Winter Blues, affects around 18 per cent of people.

It can cause a variety of symptoms including, lethargy, irritability, poor concentration, overeating, and a suppressed immune system, leading to an increased risk of infection.

SAD is thought to be caused by a number of factors, including a biochemical imbalance in the brain, triggered by the shortening daylight hours, or by disruption to the body clock, which determines whether we feel alert or sleepy.

It can be treated in several ways, including light therapy, which has been found to be effective for around 85 per cent of sufferers. By using a lightbox – a light source that is typically ten times brighter than average household lighting – the

light levels we normally experience in the spring can be mimicked, which helps combat the effects of SAD. The lightbox sits a short distance away and bathes the user in bright light, but using a lightbox isn't like being in a tanning studio – you can get on with doing things, so long as you remain within the operating range.

Dawn simulators (natural alarm clocks) are designed to wake you up naturally, and work by slowly 'fading up' the light.

Whats on the market

All prices include VAT. If your doctor prescribes a lightbox, you might be able to buy one without VAT.

Dawnlight Natural Alarm Clock £79.95

Prepare yourself for a gentle wake-up with this dawn simulator that can be set at 15, 30, 45 and 90-minute intervals. There's also a snooze function and bleeper option, and it can be used as a dimmable reading light.

■ SAD Lightbox Company, tel: 0845 095 6477 (www.sad.uk.com)

Diamond 5 £265

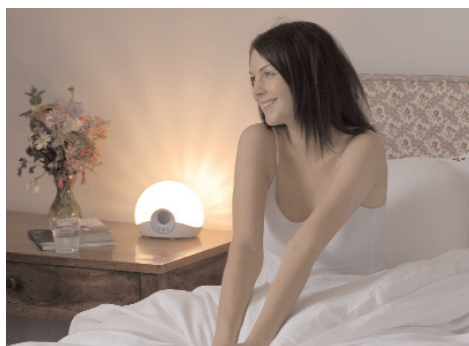
A 10,000 lumen lightbox that can be tilted forwards and backwards, and includes a carry handle. This is ideal for anyone who is short on time, because a treatment session lasts just 20 to 30 minutes.

■ SAD Lightbox Company, tel: 0845 095 6477 (www.sad.uk.com)

LitePod £135.13

A lightbox compact enough to sit on a desk, table or bedside cabinet. It has a 10,000 lux rating and suggested treatment is 60 minutes per day.

■ SAD Lightbox Company, tel: 0845 095 6477 (www.sad.uk.com)



Jargon buster

● **LED** Light-emitting diode A type of lamp used by some lightboxes

● **Lux** A measure of light intensity. Home lighting is around 300 to 500 lux, a lightbox 10,000 lux, and a bright, sunny day 100,000 lux

● **Melatonin** A hormone found in the brain that is produced during darkness and helps us sleep. People with SAD often have higher than normal levels of melatonin during the winter. Light therapy can help lower levels of melatonin

● **Neurotransmitter** A chemical in the brain which carries messages

● **SD card** A memory card about the size of a postage stamp

● **Serotonin** A neurotransmitter. People suffering from SAD tend to have lower levels of serotonin than non-sufferers in the winter months

● **UV filter** An ultra-violet filter. This helps protect the eyes from UV light.



Lumie Arabica £99.95 (above right)

A lightbox with a 10,000 lux rating, the Arabica is typically used for 90 minutes at a distance of 50cm. It includes a built-in handle and weighs less than 2kg.
■ Tel: 01954 780500 (www.lumie.com)

Lumie Bodyclock Starter 30 £59.95 (below right)

This dawn simulator offers 30-minute sunrise and sunset settings, for a gentle wake-up or sleep. There's also a bleeper option, snooze feature and power failure backup, and it can also be used as dimmable bedside lighting.
■ Tel: 01954 780500 (www.lumie.com)

Lumie Bodyclock Elite 300 £149.99 (above centre)

A dawn simulator packed with features including sunset and sunrise modes that be programmed at 15, 30, 60 and 90-minute intervals, AM/FM radio, MP3 playback (from SD memory cards), sounds for sleep or wake-up (including waves and dawn chorus), guided sleep meditation tracks, backup bleeper and power failure backup.
■ Tel: 01954 780500 (www.lumie.com)

Philips goLite Blu £210.33 (below left)

Measuring just 14cm high by 13.5cm wide and 2.5cm deep, and weighing only 360g, the goLite Blu is claimed to be the world's smallest light therapy product. It uses LED lighting and has a 10,000 lux rating. This highly portable lightbox offers up to eight 20-minute sessions on a fully charged battery.
■ SAD Light



Hire Company, tel: 01704 500505 (www.sad-lighthouse.co.uk)

Philips Wake-Up Light £130 (above left)

Another product that promises you a gentle wake-up. The Wake-Up Light has a 300 lux rating, FM radio and natural sounds (such as birds and waves). It includes an energy-saving lamp with a life expectancy of around seven years.
■ Tel: 0800 331 6015 (www.philips.co.uk)

Diamond 4 £257.33

The Diamond 4's 10,000 lumens rating means treatment time is just 20 to 30 minutes. It can be tilted and has a curved shape which focuses the light for maximum effect. It also includes a carry handle.
■ SAD Light Hire Company, tel: 01704 500505 (www.sad-lighthouse.co.uk)



Diamond 4

SADA

If you suffer from SAD and would like more information or support, the Seasonal Affective Disorder Association (SADA) can help. SADA is a voluntary organisation and registered charity with around 1500 members. Members can receive telephone support, newsletters (including news about the latest SAD treatment and research) and attend an annual general meeting, which includes specially invited speakers.
■ For more details, write to: SAD Association, PO Box 989, Steyning BN44 3HG, enclosing an SAE, or you can go to the website: (www.sada.org.uk).

10 top tips

1. Some doctors are not that knowledgeable about SAD, and you might want to contact an organisation such as SADA for further advice (see panel above)
2. Lightboxes are not available on the NHS, but if your doctor prescribes one, you can claim VAT. Some light therapy products (such as dawn simulators) might not be exempt from VAT. Make sure your lightbox is certified as a medical device. If it isn't, it might not help your condition
3. Check the lightbox conforms to European Standards (evidenced by a CE mark relating to medical devices). The treatment should be proved from evidence obtained in clinical trials
4. Lightboxes that can be

- tilted to enable the light to be directed more precisely. Check the lightbox's lux level and operating distance
5. Deciding how frequently to use it is a case of trial and error. You should be prepared to adjust the manufacturer's advice, for example using the box both in the early morning and in the late afternoon
6. If you have a busy lifestyle, you might want to consider lightboxes offering a very high light intensity, as these typically only require 20 to 30 minutes' treatment
7. Check if the lightbox has a UV filter
8. If possible, try to get a home trial to ensure the lightbox is right for you
9. Renting a lightbox is another option. See (www.sad-lighthouse.co.uk)
10. Portable lightboxes mean you can use them away from home.