

Lesson 6. Look on the Bright Side

It is clear that most plants require sunlight to survive, but did you know that the same can be said for humans? Seasonal Affective Disorder or SAD, is a type of mental illness that causes depressive episodes during certain times of the year. More specifically during late fall and late winter. While it is not clear what causes SAD, some researchers believe that lack of light is a contributing factor. In other words, the lack of sunlight during this time of year.

Lack of sunlight has been known to affect a person's circadian rhythm. The circadian rhythm regulates your sleep-wake cycle. When there is not enough light, the brain can produce too much melatonin (sleep hormone) and too little serotonin (the chemical that affects mood). People who live in areas with less sunlight in the fall and winter, are more likely to be affected by SAD.

A possible solution to addressing SAD is light therapy. Light therapy replaces sunshine with artificial light during the dark months in the fall and winter. The light boxes used for light therapy need to have at least 10,000 lux exposure ("Lux" measures the intensity of light), as sunlight has about 50,000 lux. During the light therapy session, the person will face the light box towards them for at least thirty minutes while they relax. It is also recommended that this be done in the morning before 10:00 AM. Using light therapy during darker seasons, has proven to be an effective treatment for those dealing with SAD.

If healthy amounts of sunlight can be beneficial for both plants and humans, could the same be said for moonlight? Explain your reasoning.

Look back at your moon journal from **Lesson 2**. Compare your notes on your behavior and health with what you learned about seasonal affective disorder. Do you notice any new patterns? Explain your reasoning.