The approach of winter, when the weather turns colder in many parts of the country and there is less natural sunlight, can bring on a type of depression known as Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD). SAD is most common in parts of the world furthest from the equator, where winters have very short days. Some studies show that as many as 25% of people suffer some degree of mood shifts with the seasons, and for 15% the changes can be quite severe. You can tell the difference between SAD and generalized depression because the feelings of Seasonal Affective Disorder usually lift in the spring and summer months. For those who are sensitive to lack of sunlight in the wintertime, symptoms may include:

- Fatigue
- Oversleeping
- Wanting to “hibernate” until spring
- Sadness, moodiness, or irritability
- Overeating (especially craving carbohydrates later on in the day)
- A loss of interest in usual activities

Here’s the good news: SAD can be treated quite successfully with “full-spectrum” lights, which provide artificial sunlight. According to the Mayo clinic, light therapy generally starts working after a few days to two weeks of consistent use, and causes few side-effects.

Although research on light therapy is limited, it does appear to be effective in relieving SAD symptoms for many people. Before purchasing a light therapy box, however, it is best to talk to your doctor and familiarize yourself with the products to ensure that you select one that is safe and effective.

Additional treatments for SAD may include talk therapy and medication. Winter may also be a good time to try to nurture your creativity, hobbies, and relationships. Work on that photo album you’ve been wanting to create, host a weekly or monthly game-night with friends, meet at the movies, pick a new place for dinner, host a holiday get-together, and start new traditions that you can look forward to when the seasons change.

Worried about how you’ll feel this winter? Feel free to call your EAP for help in determining whether you might benefit from one of these tactics.

**Employee Assistance Program**

1-800-451-1834