

**EPISODE 294**

## [INTRODUCTION]

**[00:00:19] AVH:** Hey, there. Welcome to Paleo Magazine Radio, I am your friendly neighborhood podcast host, Asheigh VanHouten. Today, we're talking about something that I think is very relevant for this time of year, you're listening to this, it's probably early, mid-December and we're settling in to the winter wonderland that is the colder months, well, most of us, not all of you. Some of you are lucky enough to live in warm places year-round and maybe you're complaining about being hot. but I don't want to hear it! because I live in a cold place and I've lived in a cold place for most of my life and I still struggle with it.

I still struggle with the really short, dark, cold days. There's plenty of fun to be had in the winter and snow and skiing and winter sports and all that good stuff. And it's beautiful to see the snowfall but you know what? Sometimes it sucks. Sometimes, that cold weather and all of the things that come with it can really affect you on a physiological level and it's not just you. You're not alone and it's not your fault. There's a lot of things going on that contribute to Seasonal Affective Disorder or SAD. There's a wide range of experiences and symptoms that people can have as a result of these colder, darker months. But there's stuff you can do about it which is the good news.

And so today, in this episode, I'm actually going to read you an article in our current issue, the December/January issue, all about Seasonal Affective Disorder, what it is, how it happens, how you can mitigate the negative symptoms and how you can just kind of have a happier, healthier winter no matter where you live and I think that's really important so that's why I wanted to pass this one along to you and of course, remember that you can get this and all the wonderful things that are in *Paleo Magazine* every issue if you subscribe to it.

You can get a digital issue, you can get a print issue, you can go to [paleomagazine.com](http://paleomagazine.com) and subscriber. I highly recommend it, there is articles from me and product reviews, every issue. There's all kinds of great workout ideas. There's recipes. There's the latest research in science as far as nutrition and longevity and health goes. It's the only magazine I read cover to cover. And I guess I'm biased but it's a good publication.

Highly recommend you get into that, maybe buy it for yourself as a Christmas present or for someone else. But in the meantime, here's just a little free sneak peek at a very relevant and timely article all about Seasonal Affective Disorder by none other than Chris Kresser, you're probably very familiar with him.

He's a functional medicine practitioner. He's been a guest on the podcast before. He wrote *Unconventional Medicine and The Paleo Cure*, and he wrote this article. I hope you enjoy it. But before we dive into it, I got to talk to you about our show sponsor

[SPONSOR MESSAGE]

New one, Don't fast forward. Listen to it. Sponsor of today's episode is the Metabolic Health Summit and this is an event that brings together speakers from around the world in a four-day scientific conference. Attendees learn about the latest research behind the ketogenic diet, metabolic therapies from scientists, progressive physicians, influencers, thought leaders. Everybody who is into the nutritional and therapeutic keto world is going to be there.

It's in Los Angeles on January 30<sup>th</sup> to February 2<sup>nd</sup> and I'm going to go this time because we were involved in this, a summit last year. I didn't get to go because it's far away, you know. I'm on the East Coast but I want to go because it looks like a really good time, it really looks like the perfect combination of high-level cutting-edge science and research and just a bunch of health nerds getting together to learn and connect and have some fun.

They have an expo with all kinds of new innovative food and tech. They've got plenty of networking opportunities, keto friendly receptions every night, including a gala dinner on Saturday night where you can get specific tickets to that and the comedian JP Sears is actually to be performing. And if you have not heard him or watched the videos, you got to Google this guy immediately. He's hilarious. But anyway, I'm really looking forward to going.

You've got speakers like former *Paleo Magazine Radio* guest, Dom D'Agostino, Rob Wolf, Ryan Lowry, among many others and it's going to be a good time. If you want to go and you want a discount on your tickets, they're offering that to my listeners. Go to [metabolichealthsummit.com](http://metabolichealthsummit.com)

and the code is PaleoMagMHS. I'll put that in the show notes so that you have it and you get 20% off your ticket.

Do that, hang out with me at the metabolic health summit in January in LA and that's that for now, enjoy my attempt at reading an awesome article about Seasonal Affective Disorder by Chris Kresser that is found in the December/January issue of *Paleo Magazine*. Here you go.

[EPISODE]

**[0:05:03.2] AVH:** *How to Combat Seasonal Depression* by Chris Kresser. Does winter bum you out? If you experienced depression like symptoms, winter after winter, you may be suffering from Seasonal Affective Disorder or SAD. Symptoms of SAD generally include depressed mood, fatigue, irritability, difficulty concentrating, excessive sleeping and carb cravings.

SAD prevalence increases as geographical latitude increases in the United States. For example, only 1.5% of adults in Florida develop it. But almost 10% of New Hampshire residents do. Important note, depression can be a serious life-threatening illness. If you or someone you love is depressed, please seek help from a licensed professional. Do not stop taking antidepressants with the knowledge and support of your doctor and never stop these types of medications cold turkey.

What causes SAD? Less sunlight during winter is a major contributor to SAD. Sunlight is the most potent regulator of our internal circadian rhythms which control melatonin, cortisol, core body temperature, blood pressure and more on 24-hour cycles. For example, cortisol should peak when you wake up and taper off before bedtime to prepare you for sleep. When the days are shorter, we're exposed to less sunlight during the morning and we turn on more artificial lights in the evening.

Disrupting natural light exposure patterns messes with our circadian rhythms, increasing sleepiness and depression. Less sunlight exposure and/or disrupted circadian rhythms may mediate other factors associated with or involved in the progression of depression.

**[0:06:24.2]** Such as, lower vitamin D3 levels from less sunlight exposure, HPA axis dysregulation from cortisol rhythm disruption and/or from stress due to holidays or financial worries at the end of the year. And elevated inflammation from too many sugary refined processed foods. Holiday parties anybody? Not enough exercise and not enough sleep.

Some tips for combatting seasonal depression. Antidepressants are among the most prescribed meds in the United States. But up to half of people with major depression do not respond well to them. When they are effective, antidepressants take weeks to confer noticeable benefits and they often have side effects. One has to slowly wean off of them. This timeframe doesn't align well with the disorder that only occurs seasonally. Antidepressants can be lifesaving and effective but not for everyone.

When possible, I refer patients to natural methods of combatting seasonal depression like bright light therapy which involves daily exposure to a special light from a light box for 10 to 20 minutes. Usually morning exposure is most effective but the ideal timing can vary from person to person. An ideal light box provides full spectrum light at 10,000 lux and some models sell for around a hundred bucks.

BLT, bright light therapy, improves mood, sleep, circadian rhythms and HPA axis activity. It has been proven effective for treating both SAD and non-seasonal related depression with a 70% positive treatment response. Some evidence indicates that combining light therapy with antidepressants adds no benefits over light therapy treatment alone for SAD.

**[0:07:49.3]** Although BLT results typically take one to two weeks to take effect, some users experience improvement after a single session. Side effects are rare but can include headache, eye strain and sleep difficulties

When stopping treatment, a gradual weaning is recommended. Another tip: dawn simulator. Our ancestors didn't have alarm clocks. Humans evolved rising with the sun. A dawn simulator as its name indicates, mimics a sunrise by gradually increasing a light it emits during the 30 minutes leading up to a set alarm time. Compared to those who use a traditional alarm clock, people who use a dawn simulator in one study had higher cortisol levels at 15 and 30 and 45 minutes after waking up.

If in tune with its natural rhythm, cortisol should be highest in the morning. Dawn simulators have been shown to be effective for treating SAD and may even offer a lower chance of SAD reoccurrence compared to BLT.

Another option is a negative ion generator. Negative ions are produced in nature by plants, sunlight and moving water. Some evidence indicates that less exposure to negative ions and greater exposure to positive ions from electronics, pollution and allergens may contribute to depression, anxiety and other cognitive and behavioral disorders.

If you are deep in the trenches of SAD, spending time meditating near a waterfall might not be possible but a high-density negative air ion generator can substitute. Similar to a light box a negative ion generator should be placed near your body for a brief time each day preferably in the morning. Negative ion generators have been shown to be effective for both seasonal and non-seasonal depression and can even have a mood boosting effect in non-depressed individuals.

Negative ion generators have very few known side effects but a relapse of symptoms is likely if you stop treatment abruptly. Then there is gut therapy. The gut and the brain communicate with each other through several pathways. For instance, intestinal microbes synthesize neurotransmitters that can signal the brain directly through the vagus nerve. In fact, about 90% of the body's serotonin is produced in the gut not in the brain.

**[0:09:39.4]** The evidence connecting gut problems to depression is growing. Disrupted gut micro biomes have been associated with depression in humans. Transferring fecal micro biota from depressed humans into mice increases the animal's depressed behavior. Probiotics have reduced anxious and depressive symptoms in mice. Antibiotics have alleviated depressive symptoms in some cases. In short, a healthy gut will support a healthy brain.

How to heal your gut is beyond the scope of this article but the general framework involves the following: Treating any underlying chronic infection. Consuming a variety of probiotic and prebiotic foods. Avoiding inflammatory foods like industrial seed oils, refined carbs and excess refined sugars and managing stress.

Another option, cognitive behavioral therapy or CBT. The mind is a powerful thing. CBT helps people recognize and correct negative or inaccurate beliefs through positive self-talk and self-compassion. If you tend to be glass half empty type of person, this therapy might be especially helpful for you. In the scientific literature CBT repeatedly proves effective for treating depression and other psychological disorders. Compared to light therapy, CBT resulted in lower SAD reoccurrence IN a large clinical trial. CBT and bright light therapy combined may offer greater benefit than either alone. Another option, go out anyway. Humans are social creatures.

Our ancestors lived in extended family tribes all year long. But in our modern world, cold and gray winters can isolate us. Too much isolation is a common depression trigger and may be one contributing factor to SAD. So, choose to embrace the beauty of winter. Even in winter you can get fresh air, a little bit of sunshine and quality time with loved ones. So, take a brisk morning walk, pursue a winter sport like skiing, snow shoeing or ice skating.

**[0:11:17.2]** Go sledding with your kids or your friends or take a nature hike by a river or other flowing body of water for the extra negative ion exposure. Exercise in general may help ward off depression and lower inflammation. If you can exercise outside, you will also get the added mood boosting benefit of sunlight. Another option, consider eating more carbs. If you are on a very low carb diet and struggle with SAD each winter, you might want to experiment with adding more high-quality carbs to your diet this season.

Increasing carbohydrates may improve serotonin synthesis and transmission by increasing tryptophan uptake into the brain. Tryptophan depletion is common in SAD and this could be one reason why so many people with SAD crave carbs. You can also try boosting tryptophan levels with pastured eggs, wild fish, pastured poultry, seaweed and spinach. Here are some supplements that you may want to consider: work with a functional medicine practitioner to determine if any of the following might be appropriate.

CBD oil. CBD oil hasn't been studied for treating SAD specifically but evidence shows it can be helpful for reducing inflammation, treating anxiety and helping sleep problems. Vitamin D3. If you live in the northern half of the United States and all of Canada, during the winter months, the sun doesn't provide enough UVB to make adequate vitamin D3. So, consider a supplement

if your levels fall below 35 NG over ML. St. John's Wort, this herb activates serotonin and GABA receptors.

It reduces depression symptoms as effectively as anti-depressants but with fewer side effects. Do not take St. John's-wort concurrently with SSRI's or while doing light therapy. B vitamins. Vitamin's B6 and B12 are needed for serotonin synthesis since they are water soluble, overdose is unlikely and herbs like Motherwort, rhodiola, saffron and chamomile can help ease symptoms of depression.

**[0:13:00.8]** So in conclusion. Season Depression at a glance. Seasonal Affective Disorder affects two to 10% of US adults and up to 15% of others experience milder winter blues. Although underlying conditions like chronic inflammation and genetics susceptibility may increase the risk of SAD, shorter days during the winter are most likely to trigger. Less overall daylight can disrupt the circadian rhythms that regulate autonomic functions of blood pressure and body temperature and the daily fluctuation of hormone levels like melatonin and cortisol.

SAD is four times as common in women than men. The most studied and effective natural treatments for SAD include bright light therapy, high density negative ion exposure, dawn simulators and cognitive behavioral therapy. And lastly, healing your gut and restoring specific nutritional deficiencies may also help ease SAD symptoms.

[END OF DISCUSSION]

**[0:13:53.1] AVH:** All right that's it guys. Keeping it short and sweet this week. I hope you learned something. I hope that's helpful. If you know anybody who is suffering from even minor winter blues or something more serious, feel free to send this along to them and let them have a listen. They don't have to listen to an hour-long podcast. This is short and sweet but full of good information and just a reminder that this stuff affects a lot of people to varying degrees.

And there is something you can do about it. There are always things that you can do about it to improve your situation not matter how cold and tired and miserable you are this winter, which I hope you are not.

But anyway, if you enjoyed this please share it. Please share it on social media, tag me @themuscle Maven. Tag *Paleo Magazine*. We'll help you share it that will be great. Leave a rating and review on iTunes for me if you are enjoying what you are hearing.

Don't forget again, shout out to the Metabolic Health Summit, which is sponsoring this podcast and if you want to get tickets to the event that is going to be at the end of January in Los Angeles, go to [metabolicealthsummit.com](http://metabolicealthsummit.com) and use the code, PaleoMagMHS, you get 20% off your ticket and come hang out with me and learn all about keto and health and good times in LA in January. And it will be warm there. Probably. Warmer than where I am anyway.

So that's that. I got to stop rambling. Thank you as always for listening and coming along on the ride with me and see you next week.

[OUTRO]

**[0:15:02.8] AV:** The intro music for *Paleo Magazine Radio* is a song called *Stronger* performed by Alter Ego and I hope you love it.

[END]