# Shining a light on SAD

For those of you who do not know what [SAD](https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/seasonal-affective-disorder-sad/) is, count your blessings. It is a form of depression that makes its presence felt (usually) in winter and in varying degrees of severity. On a descending scale I have seen the severity levels categorised as

* Thriving
* Surviving
* Struggling
* Drowning

Describing SAD, or for that matter depression, to people who don’t go through it is difficult. “A child doesn’t understand a hammer until he’s mashed his finger at a nail”. A friend described it as losing the concept of happiness. They knew they had been happy in the past it was now a word to which no meaning could be attached. On a more positive note, there’s the “sudden realisation I felt like me again” at the end of it!

For SAD sufferers the external stresses forced on us by COVID certainly present additional straws for the donkey’s back.

* Loss of or separation from loved ones
* Fears about job security and all that entails
* Stress over the business decisions that would usually be rare occurrences (furloughs, redundancies and business survival)
* Extraverts forced to live an introverted way of life

There is no cure as such but there are coping strategies, habits to acquire that help and in more severe cases, antidepressant medication. It is the habits and coping strategies I should like to share with you.

## How can you spot a SAD sufferer?

* Unless you know someone well you probably can’t.
* Unless you are looking for it you probably won’t
* Unless they feel safe telling you the you probably won’t

On the latter point if a SAD sufferer feels unsafe, they will be masking like crazy, even overcompensating for it.

Fortunately, a lot of work has taken place over the last few years to educate people and destigmatise depression and mental health issues. It is far easier to be open these days.

Easier is not the same as easy. However, this new openness has shown just how many friends and colleagues have fought or are fighting their demons. For me this perspective helped more than anything else.

## What have I found to be helpful in dealing with SAD?

### Light, especially daylight

You can’t control the daylight but you can control what you do with what is available.

Working from home under COVID has given me more control over my time. I am not constrained by the need to commute or being stuck 16 floors up in an office block. This gives me the freedom to adjust my schedule to take advantage of what daylight is available. Even if this means working at opposite ends of the day to gain daylight in the middle.

I also bought a SAD light which I use every morning. It took about a fortnight before I started to notice a difference.

### Alcohol, caffeine and sugar

Alcohol is a depressant and metabolic poison. The temptation is to drink more when it is better to cut back as much as possible. The solution to life’s problems are unlikely to be viewed through the bottom of a glass.

As anxiety is a factor for me so I cut back on coffee. As an IT person this was quite a difficult adjustment to make.

The main problem with sugary or refined carbohydrate food is that it creates highs and low, surges and slumps. With the lows and slumps comes the craving for more sugary or refined carbohydrate food. This has predictable consequences.

### Exercise

It takes surprisingly little exercise to gain a noticeable benefit. A simple walk in the fresh air is better than nothing. Around 15 minutes at an intensity that leaves you breathless is all it takes to have a real impact. Much as I detest running all I have to do is put on my trainers and run 1½ miles around the village first thing in the morning.

I noticed three benefits

* Mood lift
* Fitness improvement
* Bringing my body tiredness in line with mental tiredness aids sleep

### Milestones to half-milestones