

# *IN SIGHT* for Oregon Lawyers and Judges

IMPROVING THE QUALITY OF YOUR PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL LIFE

## COPING WITH SEASONAL CHANGES

During this dark time of year against the backdrop of gray Pacific Northwest skies, many of us wake up in the dark, go to work in the dark, and return home in the dark. It can be challenging to cope with the change in season. As the days get shorter, many people find themselves feeling sad, irritable, more withdrawn, and less energetic. Some people have more serious mood changes year after year, lasting throughout the fall and winter when there's less natural sunlight. What makes the darkening days challenging, and what can we do about it?

Reduced sunlight in fall and winter can disrupt your body's internal clock or circadian rhythm. This 24-hour "master clock" responds to cues in your surroundings, especially light and darkness. During the day, your brain sends signals to other parts of the body to help keep you awake and ready for action. At night, a tiny gland in the brain produces a chemical called melatonin, which helps you sleep. Shortened daylight hours in winter can alter this natural rhythm and lead to seasonal depression in some people.

We can't change our latitude, but there are a few things we can do to help our bodies and brains adjust to this yearly seasonal transition:

- Get as much light as possible during the day. Sit next to a window, walk outside, expose as much skin as weather permits, use artificial lights (full spectrum, cool white, or an agricultural grow light) during Oregon gray days.

- Get exercise daily, outside and during daylight hours, if possible.

- Talk to your doctor about light therapy, supplements, and/or medications.

- Take care of yourself. Socialize. Meditate. Take a real or mental vacation to a relaxing and sunny location!

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*Sources: National Institutes of Health, Mayo Clinic*

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