

# JAN

Job Accommodation Network

Practical Solutions • Workplace Success

## Accommodation and Compliance Series

# Accommodation and Compliance Series: Employees with Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD)

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Employment Policy, U.S. Department of Labor

## Preface

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## **JAN'S Accommodation and Compliance Series**

### **Introduction**

JAN's Accommodation and Compliance Series is designed to help employers determine effective accommodations and comply with Title I of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Each publication in the series addresses a specific medical condition and provides information about the condition, ADA information, accommodation ideas, and resources for additional information.

The Accommodation and Compliance Series is a starting point in the accommodation process and may not address every situation. Accommodations should be made on a case by case basis, considering each employee's individual limitations and accommodation needs. Employers are encouraged to contact JAN to discuss specific situations in more detail.

For information on assistive technology and other accommodation ideas, visit JAN's Searchable Online Accommodation Resource (SOAR) at <https://askjan.org/soar>.

### **Information about Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD)**

Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD) is a type of depression that is exacerbated by gray overcast skies and poor indoor lighting. Some common symptoms of SAD are:

- Oversleeping;
- Fatigue;
- Feeling lethargic;
- Irritability and stress intolerance; and
- Lack of interest in daily activities, sex, or social interactions.

Treatment for SAD usually involves medication combined with light therapy. Light therapy is exposure to high intensity bright lights, typically referred to as light or sun boxes. An individual spends a period of time each day exposed to this light, and treatment can last from 30 minutes to 2 hours per day. Many of these light boxes are portable and can be placed on a desk or table in the work environment.

### **Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD) and the Americans with Disabilities Act**

The ADA does not contain a list of medical conditions that constitute disabilities. Instead, the ADA has a general definition of disability that each person must meet. A person has a disability if he/she has a physical or mental impairment that substantially

limits one or more major life activities, a record of such an impairment, or is regarded as having an impairment. For more information about how to determine whether a person has a disability under the ADA, see [How to Determine Whether a Person Has a Disability under the Americans with Disabilities Act Amendments Act \(ADAAA\)](#).

## **Accommodating Employees with Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD)**

People with seasonal affective disorder may develop some of the limitations discussed below, but seldom develop all of them. Also, the degree of limitation will vary among individuals. Be aware that not all people with arthritis will need accommodations to perform their jobs and many others may only need a few accommodations. The following is only a sample of the possibilities available. Numerous other accommodation solutions may exist.

Four basic light products are available to accommodate workers with SAD:

- **Light Boxes:** These are rectangular light fixtures that have several fluorescent tubes that produce between 5,000 and 10,000 lux and come in many different sizes and styles.
- **Light Visors:** These are head-mounted light sources that resembling tennis visors and are good choices for people who do not have sedentary jobs or need to be mobile during the day.
- **Desk Lamps:** These resemble typical office lamps.
- **Dawn Stimulators:** These are devices that mimic natural sunrises by gradually brightening rooms over programmed periods of time.

JAN's [Effective Accommodation Practices \(EAP\) Series: Executive Functioning Deficits](#) is a publication detailing accommodations for individuals with limitations related to executive functioning. These ideas may be helpful in determining accommodations.

### **Questions to Consider:**

1. What limitations is the employee experiencing?
2. How do these limitations affect the employee and the employee's job performance?
3. What specific job tasks are problematic as a result of these limitations?
4. What accommodations are available to reduce or eliminate these problems? Are all possible resources being used to determine possible accommodations?
5. Has the employee been consulted regarding possible accommodations?
6. Once accommodations are in place, would it be useful to meet with the employee to evaluate the effectiveness of the accommodations and to determine whether additional accommodations are needed?
7. Do supervisory personnel and employees need training?

## **Accommodation Ideas:**

### **Limitations**

#### Decreased Stamina/Fatigue

- Aide/Assistant/Attendant
- Anti-fatigue Matting
- Ergonomic Assessments
- Ergonomic Equipment
- Job Restructuring
- Periodic Rest Breaks
- Task Rotation
- Wearable Anti-fatigue Matting
- Stand-lean Stools
- Telework, Work from Home, Working Remotely
- Worksite Redesign / Modified Workspace

#### Executive Functioning Deficits

- Apps for Concentration
- Checklists
- Color Coded System
- Cubicle Doors, Shields, and Shades
- Environmental Sound Machines / Tinnitus Maskers / White Noise Machines
- Form Generating Software
- Job Coaches
- Job Restructuring
- Marginal Functions
- Modified Break Schedule
- Noise Canceling Headsets
- Recorded Directives, Messages, Materials
- Sound Absorption and Sound Proof Panels
- Speech Recognition Software

- Timers and Watches
- Wall Calendars and Planners
- Written Instructions

#### Stress Intolerance

- Apps for Anxiety and Stress
- Behavior Modification Techniques
- Counseling/Therapy
- Environmental Sound Machines / Tinnitus Maskers / White Noise Machines
- Flexible Schedule
- Job Restructuring
- Marginal Functions
- Modified Break Schedule
- Supervisory Methods
- Support Animal
- Support Person

#### **Work-Related Functions**

##### Stress

- Apps for Anxiety and Stress
- Behavior Modification Techniques
- Counseling/Therapy
- Flexible Schedule
- Job Restructuring
- Marginal Functions
- Modified Break Schedule
- On-site Mentoring
- Service Animal
- Simulated Skylights and Windows
- Supervisory Methods
- Support Animal

- Support Person
- Task Rotation
- Telework, Work from Home, Working Remotely
- Uninterrupted Work Time

## Situations and Solutions:

**A grocery store bagger with seasonal affective disorder (SAD) had difficulty working an early schedule due to oversleeping.**

She also experienced fatigue and depression during late fall and winter months. She was accommodated with an afternoon schedule and was moved to the front of the store, which had windows that let sunlight enter her workspace.

**A driver with seasonal affective disorder (SAD) who picks up and delivers clients to various appointments began to forget waiting clients as well as the routes she needed to travel in order to deliver them to the appropriate facility.**

When her employer mentioned the mistakes, the driver broke down. She described her depression and anxiety with the change of seasons and how it affected her memory. The use of reminder apps, as well as those to help with directions, were discussed as possible accommodation solutions.

**Due to seasonal affective disorder (SAD) an elementary teacher experienced temporary but extreme fatigue that was expected to persist for several months due to a change in medication and the onset of winter.**

He was accommodated with the removal of two extra duty requirements. Job restructuring, which consisted of temporarily removing his early and late bus duties, caused no hardship to the employer and greatly reduced his expenditure of depleted energy.

**Due to her limitations from seasonal affective disorder (SAD), an office worker requested to move from her current location within a sea of cubicles to an office with windows.**

Because offices were provided to management only, the employer moved the employee's cubicle to the side of the "sea" where a bank of windows actually provided more natural light than any of the offices would have.

**An architect in a large, busy, open office space requested a private workspace (on the sunny side of the building) to help her handle stress and emotions brought on by the open, crowded, and often noisy environment.**

Her employer agreed to her requested accommodations for seasonal affective disorder (SAD), but also provided telework as an option as well as flexible scheduling for when the employee was particularly stressed while under firm deadlines.

**An employee at a manufacturing site had been successfully working the second shift with seasonal affective disorder (SAD).**

He experienced fatigue and difficulty with concentration due to disruption of his sleep patterns and couldn't work the early shift a new manager assigned him to. The employee was accommodated with the ability to remain on his current shift. The new manager found many employees willing to switch and work the day shift.

## Products

There are numerous products that can be used to accommodate people with limitations. JAN's Searchable Online Accommodation Resource at <https://askjan.org/soar> is designed to let users explore various accommodation options. Many product vendor lists are accessible through this system; however, JAN provides these lists and many more that are not available on the Web site upon request. Contact JAN directly if you have specific accommodation situations, are looking for products, need vendor information, or are seeking a referral.

## Resources

### **Job Accommodation Network**

West Virginia University  
PO Box 6080  
Morgantown, WV 26506-6080  
Toll Free: (800) 526-7234  
TTY: (304) 293-7186  
Fax: (304) 293-5407  
[jan@askjan.org](mailto:jan@askjan.org)  
<http://AskJAN.org>

The Job Accommodation Network (JAN) is a free consulting service that provides information about job accommodations, the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), and the employability of people with disabilities.

### **Office of Disability Employment Policy**

200 Constitution Avenue,  
NW, Room S-1303  
Washington, DC 20210  
Toll Free: (866) 633-7365  
[odep@dol.gov](mailto:odep@dol.gov)  
<http://dol.gov/odep>

The Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP) is an agency within the U.S. Department of Labor. ODEP provides national leadership to increase employment opportunities for adults and youth with disabilities while striving to eliminate barriers to employment.

**Brain & Behavior Research Foundation**

90 Park Avenue,  
16th Floor  
New York, NY 10016  
Toll Free: (800) 829-8289  
Direct: (646) 681-4888  
[info@bbrfoundation.org](mailto:info@bbrfoundation.org)  
<https://bbrfoundation.org/>

The Brain & Behavior Research Foundation is committed to alleviating the suffering caused by mental illness by awarding grants that will lead to advances and breakthroughs in scientific research.

**Mayo Clinic**

13400 E. Shea Blvd.  
Scottsdale, AZ 85259  
Direct: (480) 301-8000  
<http://www.mayoclinic.org/>

The Mayo Clinic's mission to inspire hope and contribute to health and well-being by providing the best care to every patient through integrated clinical practice, education and research.

**MedlinePlus**

8600 Rockville Pike  
Bethesda, MD 20894  
[custserv@nlm.nih.gov](mailto:custserv@nlm.nih.gov)  
<https://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/>

MedlinePlus is the National Institutes of Health's Web site for patients and their families and friends. Produced by the National Library of Medicine, the world's largest medical library, it brings you information about diseases, conditions, and wellness issues in language you can understand. MedlinePlus offers reliable, up-to-date health information, anytime, anywhere, for free.

Created by the U.S. National Library of Medicine

**Mental Health America**

500 Montgomery Street  
Suite 820  
Alexandria, VA 22314  
Toll Free: (800) 969-6642  
Direct: (703) 684-7722  
Fax: (703) 684-5968  
<http://www.mentalhealthamerica.net/>

Mental Health America (MHA) – founded in 1909 – is the nation's leading community-based nonprofit dedicated to addressing the needs of those living with mental illness and to promoting the overall mental health of all Americans. Our work is driven by our commitment to promote mental health as a critical part of overall wellness, including prevention services for all, early identification and intervention for those at risk, and integrated care and treatment for those who need it, with recovery as the goal.

**National Center for Biotechnology Information**

8600 Rockville Pike  
Bethesda, MD 20894  
[pubmedcentral@ncbi.nlm.nih.gov](mailto:pubmedcentral@ncbi.nlm.nih.gov)  
<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/>

MISSION: IMS brings together an international community of health care professionals, researchers, educators, and others to improve care and transform delivery of treatment to those suffering from soft tissue pain through the promotion and exchange of globally recognized research, education, and innovation in patient care.

**National Institute of Mental Health**

6001 Executive Boulevard  
Rockville, MD 20852  
Toll Free: (866) 615-6464  
Direct: (301) 443-4513  
Fax: (301) 443-4279  
[nimhinfo@nih.gov](mailto:nimhinfo@nih.gov)  
<http://www.nimh.nih.gov>

NIMH offers a variety of publications and other educational resources to help people with mental disorders, the general public, mental health and health care practitioners,

and researchers gain a better understanding of mental illnesses and the research programs of the NIMH. All publications and educational materials are written by science writers, in collaboration with NIMH scientists and outside reviewers.

### **The Environmental Illness Resource**

162 Bramham Drive

Oakdale Court

Harrogate, North Yorkshire, England HG3 2-2UB

Toll Free: (441) 423-528055

[support@ei-resource.org](mailto:support@ei-resource.org)

<http://www.ei-resource.org/>

The Environmental Illness Resource seeks to provide those with environmental illnesses with information of the highest quality in the hope that this will lead to improved quality of life and perhaps even recovery of good health. In addition, to provide a free and open online community in which members may exchange information between themselves and support each other in their healing journeys.

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