

# Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD)

The lack of motivation you may feel when the seasons shift might be more than a difficult week or a lack of sleep. Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD) affects around 6% of Americans each year. Changes in weather and light cause temporary depression for a few months out of the year, most commonly during winter. Scientists do not fully understand what causes SAD. Research has indicated that individuals susceptible to SAD may have reduced activity of serotonin, the brain chemical which helps regulate mood. Sunlight controls the levels of molecules that help maintain normal serotonin levels, but in people with SAD, research suggests this regulation does not function properly, resulting in decreased serotonin levels in the winter.

## Managing symptoms

When seasons change, those with SAD often experience fatigue and social withdrawal. If you or someone you know has SAD, stay proactive about your mental health and follow some of these tips to combat symptoms.

### Use light therapy

Light therapy attempts to mimic natural sunlight to keep your circadian rhythm on track. A decrease in sunlight in winter can disrupt these rhythms and cause sleep disturbances. Sitting in front of a light box or moving your desk by a window can boost your mood.

### Stay active

Getting your heart rate up and moving your body increases an array of “feel-good” brain chemicals, while remaining sedentary and indoors often exacerbates depression. Take a run, go for a walk or try a new sport to improve energy levels.

### Stick to a routine

You might feel the urge to withdraw from activities and sleep more often. Going to bed and waking up at the same time everyday helps you feel refreshed.

### Supplement Vitamin D

Lack of sun exposure in the winter can lead to a Vitamin D deficiency – one risk factor for depression. Taking a supplement might relieve symptoms, but always consult with your doctor first.

### Speak with a therapist

You don't have to work through your challenges alone. A mental health professional can help treat SAD and develop the best plan for your mental health needs.

## The holiday toolkit

