

Winter Blues or SAD?

Have you ever noticed a change in your mood during winter? Maybe you feel tired all the time or have lost interest in hobbies you once enjoyed. If this change happens consistently in the fall and winter seasons, don't brush it off as the winter blues. You may have SAD.

Seasonal Affective Disorder, known as SAD, is a form of depression related to season change. Symptoms begin around the same time each year, typically with the onset of fall and continuing through winter. You may experience some of these changes:

- Little energy or desire to do things you used to enjoy
- Feeling sluggish
- Feeling more irritable, sad, or moody
- Eating too much or too little
- Sleeping too much
- Trouble focusing

More severe symptoms of SAD include feeling hopeless, abusing alcohol, pulling away from family and friends, and thinking about dying. It's normal for people to feel down and blue sometimes. However, if you feel this way for most of the time or all the time, then it's time for you to see your doctor.

What Causes SAD?

Nobody knows the exact cause of SAD. Reduced sunlight in the late fall and winter months may trigger depression in some people. Also, people with lower levels of a brain chemical called serotonin may be more likely to develop SAD. Less sunlight may cause levels of serotonin to drop and result in symptoms of depression.

What You Can Do About It

The good news is that SAD can be treated! Your doctor may suggest light therapy, which involves sitting by a light box to help create the effects of natural sunlight. Your doctor can give you advice for which light box is best.

Activities like yoga, tai chi, and other forms of exercise can relax your body and improve your mood. Meditation and music or art therapy are also great ways to calm your mind and body. Sometimes, SAD needs to be treated with medications or by seeing a mental health therapist. You and your doctor can discuss which options are best for you.

Don't let SAD get you down. See what you can do to take control over your symptoms.

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