

SAD: Seasonal Affective Disorder

It's common to be affected by changing seasons and poor weather or have times of the year when you feel less comfortable. You may have even noticed times when your mood, energy levels, eating habits or sleep patterns changed after a few days of bad weather.

But if these negative feelings and habits are starting to affect your day-to-day life, it could be a sign of depression. If they keep coming back at the same time every year, it could be seasonal depression — known as Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD).

WHAT IS SEASONAL AFFECTIVE DISORDER?

SAD is a type of depression which occurs due to seasonal changes. It's common for those with SAD to experience symptoms during colder months, which resolve in warmer weather. In some rare cases, people can experience SAD symptoms in spring and summer and feel better during winter.

What are the symptoms?

Individuals with SAD during the winter months might experience these symptoms:

- Feeling listless, sad or down most of the day, nearly every day
- Losing interest in activities you once enjoyed
- Trouble sleeping, either too much or too little
- Low energy or feeling sluggish
- Difficulty concentrating
- Increased hunger and weight gain
- Feeling hopeless, guilty or unworthy

WHAT'S BEHIND SAD?

As the seasons change, so too do some of our natural rhythms in our bodies. Sometimes these changes become more

pronounced and impact our lives. Some changes include:

Your body clock (or circadian rhythm): Reduced levels of sunlight during autumn and winter can disrupt your natural internal body clock, which helps regulate your sleep, appetite and mood. This can ultimately lead to feelings of depression and sadness.

Melatonin levels: Seasonal change can also unbalance the body's level of melatonin, a brain chemical which has a role in sleep and mood.

Serotonin levels: Reduced sunlight can also reduce our levels of serotonin, a brain chemical responsible for mood and helping us to feel good. Low levels of serotonin production can trigger depression symptoms.

SELF-HELP FOR SAD

The symptoms of SAD can make it difficult to motivate to make changes, but there are a few things you can do to improve your mood during the colder months.

Exercise regularly: Many of us hate exercising in the cold, but making time for exercise is a great way to release 'feel good' endorphins, raise our body temperature, and boost serotonin. It doesn't have to be long, either: a 10-minute walk a day can drastically improve your mood.

Get more sun: Make the most of daylight and get outside wherever possible. Sunlight can boost Vitamin D levels and improve your immune health during winter. Plus, it's a good mood booster.

Form healthy habits: It's not unusual to crave more sugar and carbohydrates and exercise less when it's cold, so try to mix your meals with mood-boosting foods like fresh greens. You can also swap refined carbohydrates for healthier options like wholegrains, oatmeal, and bananas.



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Stay connected: It can be harder to stay connected when you don't want to go out, but it's important to maintain close relationships to reduce isolation, especially if you're struggling. Take time to call, email or meet-up with friends and family who understand.

It's normal to have some days when you feel down. But if you feel down for days at a time and you can't get motivated to do activities you normally enjoy, it can be beneficial to reach out and talk to a mental health professional. This is especially important if your sleep patterns and appetite have changed, you turn to alcohol for comfort or relaxation, or you experience feelings of hopelessness.

Converge offers 24-hour, 7 day a week counselling support. Contact us via the Converge App, our website or phone - it's easy!



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