

6 Ways to Ease Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD)



EFR EMPLOYEE & FAMILY RESOURCES



SAD occurs in 1-2% of the population. A milder form of SAD, or what is commonly referred to as the "winter blues," can affect as many as 10-20% of people.

As the sun begins to retreat earlier in the day, the lack of sunlight and colder weather are prime conditions for triggering Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD). SAD is a type of depressive disorder that, as its name suggests, occurs seasonally - symptoms typically emerge in the late fall or early winter and subside mid-spring to early summer. The combination of darker days and colder weather can affect our body's production of melatonin, a sleep-related hormone, and serotonin, a neurotransmitter that affects mood.

Symptoms of SAD

Do a personal check and see if you're experiencing symptoms of Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD.)

- 1. Trouble Sleeping:** Do you feel like you want to sleep all the time or have trouble sleeping?
- 2. Exhaustion:** Do you feel too tired to carry out daily tasks?
- 3. Appetite:** Are you craving sugary and starchy foods?
- 4. Weight:** Have you experienced weight gain?
- 5. Mood:** Do you feel hopeless, irritable, sad, guilty, or down on yourself?
- 6. Socializing:** Are you avoiding people or activities you once enjoyed?
- 7. Contact:** Do you avoid sex or other physical touch?





6 Ways to Ease SAD

Don't overlook the different ways you can start enjoying the winter months and feel more like yourself!

1 Natural light

Because SAD is linked to the darkness of winter, think about the many ways you can be exposed to natural light. Natural light can help motivate you to get out of bed.



Take a walk or enjoy your coffee outdoors.



Open blinds or drapes in your home or office.



Consider switching to daylight simulation light bulbs.

2 Stress less

Reducing stress is key when it comes to feeling better.



Identify what is causing stress.



Practice relaxation techniques such as mindful breathing, yoga, or meditation.



Try to fit something you enjoy into each day.



3 Exercise

Exercise boosts feel-good hormones and brain chemicals, making it a powerful way to fight seasonal depression.



Rhythmic exercises such as walking, jogging, swimming, or dancing are known to help combat depression.



Aim for at least 30 minutes of activity most days of the week.



Consider taking your workout outside.



4 Connect

Feeling connected to other people and being socially active can help boost your mood. Consider these different approaches and plan something to look forward to each week:

- **Reconnect** with a long-time friend or introduce yourself to someone new.
- **Join** a support group for people with depression.
- **Volunteer** as a way to help others and meet new friends.

5 Light therapy

Because SAD is associated with shorter days and less natural light, here are different approaches to increase the amount of light you receive each day:

- **Light Box** - Delivers light up to 10x the intensity of normal lighting and used for about 15-30 minutes each morning.
- **Dawn Simulator** - Gradually increases the amount of light in your bedroom in the morning to simulate the sun rising.

6 Professional assistance

It is important to speak with a physician or counselor about your options regarding SAD. In some situations, cognitive behavioral therapy or medication may be necessary to help reduce symptoms and improve quality of life. Discussing the options listed above with a physician or counselor is a great place to start addressing SAD and to start feeling more like yourself.



Risk factors for SAD

- **Gender:** 75% of individuals with SAD are women, however men with SAD often experience more severe symptoms.
- **Age:** Those ages 18-30 are most likely to be diagnosed.
- **Family History:** Relatives with SAD or another type of depression puts you at greater risk.
- **Location:** Living far north or south of the equator is correlated with SAD.

