



## What You Need To Know About Combating SAD

Having a short case of the winter blues is one thing, but seasonal affective disorder (SAD) is a true, medically diagnosed type of depression that is associated with the change of seasons.

The most common variation occurs during the fall and winter periods, but there's also a less-common diagnosis that begins in the late spring or early summer. It's important to understand the difference between simply having a bad week and having a condition that necessitates therapy and lifestyle changes.

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### SAD symptoms

Experiencing one or two [symptoms](#) doesn't necessarily mean you have SAD. It's having the majority of them — simultaneously — every single day.

- Feelings of worthlessness
- Little or no energy

- Easily irritated
- Frequent thoughts of death and suicide
- No interest in activities you previously enjoyed
- Overeating/weight gain
- Social withdrawal

### Understanding the Risks

While the causes of SAD are unknown, there are certain scenarios that propose a greater risk, including family history, already being diagnosed with depression or bipolar disorder, age (younger adults and teens are more prone), being a female, and living far from the equator.

### Diagnosis

A doctor will conduct a physical exam, lab tests such as a complete blood count (CBC), and a psychological evaluation that compares behavioral patterns and feelings to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5), [published](#) by the American Psychiatric Association.

### Medical Treatment

Managing SAD typically involves a [combination of treatments](#) and medications to provide immediate and long-term relief.

- **Anti-inflammatory treatment:** There is an increasing body of research that suggests that inflammation in certain parts of the brain is responsible for the onset or worsening of depression and its symptoms, as well as degenerative conditions like Alzheimer's. Natural remedies, such as CBD supplements and dietary changes that add more [anti-inflammatory food](#) into the diet, can be helpful tools in easing SAD symptoms.
- **Light Therapy:** This is one of the first treatments given to a patient diagnosed with SAD, because it only takes a few days (or a few weeks at most) to start working. The treatment takes place in the privacy of your own home with a [special light box](#) that mimics natural outdoor light. Studies have shown that light therapy causes a change in brain chemicals that are linked to mood, thus alleviating depression.
- **Medication:** Severe cases of SAD are treated with antidepressants such as Wellbutrin XL or Aplenzin. In an effort to avoid an addiction, your doctor will likely only prescribe the medication during a specific period. It's not uncommon to start taking an antidepressant before your symptoms begin until a suggested time after they typically go away.
- **Psychotherapy:** Talking with a therapist can help you get to the root of your depression and identify coping methods for symptoms such as stress, overeating and withdrawal from social situations.
- **Animal-assisted therapy:** More and more mental health specialists are [incorporating therapy animals](#) into their patients' treatment plans, especially for those who are at risk

of developing a medication addiction. Even if your doctor doesn't recommend formal animal-assisted therapy, spending time with your own pets can offer mental health benefits, like [reduced anxiety](#) and feelings of isolation.

- **Mind-body connection:** Activities that fall within this realm of treatment should be incorporated into the lives of SAD patients on a regular basis. Unlike drugs or psychotherapy, [meditation](#), guided imagery, music and art therapy, [yoga](#) and tai chi can naturally promote joy, relaxation and peace while building self-confidence.

### Home treatment

Having winter-related SAD means you'll probably be spending a decent amount of time indoors, so it's important that your home environment is set up in a way to help you manage your depression.

- **Lighting:** Light box aside, be sure to add plenty of lighting in the areas where you spend the majority of your time. Get creative and think beyond the typical lamp, and try hanging string lights. Installing impactful ceiling fixtures or chandeliers can go a long way, too.
- **Declutter:** A clean and clutter-free home can promote [positive feelings](#) and reduce tension.
- **Color:** Even if you don't want to paint your entire bedroom in a sunny yellow hue, adding bold pops of color can have a positive impact on your mood.
- **Get Cozy:** Add plenty of extra throws, pillows, blankets in warm colors and soft textures — especially in the bedroom.
- **Plants:** Not only are plants natural air purifiers, greenery brings an outdoor, spring-like feel into the home, which can have a positive impact on the mood of someone with SAD.

It's crucial that you're honest with your doctor about any other health issues you have — particularly related to mental health — because some of the treatments for SAD can have adverse side effects. Everyone responds differently to treatment, so choose the path that works best for you. Depression of any form is a serious issue, so don't be afraid to seek the help of a health professional so you can receive proper care.

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