

## UNDERSTANDING AND MANAGING

## Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD)



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Seasonal Affective Disorder, or SAD, is a type of depression characterized by significant mood changes during seasonal transitions. Typically, SAD occurs in the fall and winter months due to reduced sunlight and shorter days. This is known as winter-pattern SAD or winter depression, which is much more common. However, some individuals experience summer-pattern SAD or summer depression, though this is less common. Many people also experience “holiday blues,” which refers to feelings of sadness or anxiety brought on by holiday-related stress. It’s important to note that holiday blues are not the same as winter-pattern SAD, as SAD is linked to changes in daylight hours rather than the calendar.

While millions of Americans experience SAD, research shows it is more common in women and often begins in young adulthood. Individuals living in northern regions of the country (e.g., Alaska, New England, North Dakota) tend to develop SAD more frequently than those in southern regions.

While Seasonal Affective Disorder affects millions of Americans annually, symptoms can vary. Common signs and symptoms of SAD include:

- Persistent sadness, anxiety, or a “low” mood for most of the day, daily, for at least two weeks
- Feelings of hopelessness, irritability, frustration, and restlessness
- Decreased energy or feeling slowed down
- Changes in sleep or appetite
- Thoughts of death or suicide/suicidal attempts

For individuals experiencing winter-pattern SAD, additional symptoms may include oversleeping, overeating, and social withdrawal.

A variety of treatments and coping strategies can help alleviate SAD symptoms, including light therapy, vitamin D supplements, psychotherapy, and possibly medication. It’s important to discuss treatment options with a medical professional. Self-care is also essential in managing SAD symptoms, and implementing strategies early in the year can help mitigate them. A few suggestions include:

- **Engage in physical activity:** Take advantage of good weather when possible by going outside to breathe fresh air. Activities like walking, biking, or simply sitting in the sun can help reduce SAD symptoms.
- **Increase vitamin D intake:** Spending time in the sun, even on cloudy days, can boost vitamin D levels. Taking a vitamin D supplement may also help reduce SAD symptoms.
- **Reach out to your support network:** Staying connected with a positive support system is key. Calling, texting, or spending time with supportive individuals can help you avoid isolation.
- **Normalize sleep patterns:** Maintaining a regular sleep schedule that allows for 7–8 hours of sleep per night is important year-round, but especially when managing winter-pattern SAD. A consistent sleep routine can help reduce or eliminate oversleeping.

If Seasonal Affective Disorder is something that impacts you, get in touch with us using our contact form at [TheVillageFamily.org](https://TheVillageFamily.org) or call **1-800-627-8220**.