

October is National Depression & Mental Health Screening Month

# Managing Seasonal Affective Disorder

Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD) is a type of depression linked to seasonal changes, typically beginning when fall starts and intensifying during late fall or early winter.

## What's the difference between SAD and the "winter blues"?

Many people feel a little down during colder months because they are stuck inside, and it gets dark early. These feelings, often called the "winter blues," are temporary. SAD is a clinical form of depression that affects your daily life, including how you feel and think. SAD can last up to five months of the year.

## What causes SAD?

About 5% of adults in the U.S. experience SAD. It tends to start in young adulthood. SAD may be caused by reduced serotonin and vitamin D levels, altered melatonin levels, decreased sunlight and shorter days.

## What are the symptoms of SAD?

If you have SAD, you may experience mood changes and symptoms of depression, including:

- Persistent sadness
- Increased anxiety
- Food cravings and weight gain
- Extreme fatigue and low energy
- Feelings of hopelessness
- Social withdrawal
- Sleep disturbances

## What are treatment options for SAD?

Treatment should be tailored to you and supervised by a healthcare professional. Options include:

- **Spending time outdoors**—Getting more sunlight can help improve your symptoms.
- **Light therapy**—Using a light therapy box daily helps regulate circadian rhythms and boost mood.
- **Cognitive behavioral therapy**—This treatment helps identify and change negative thought patterns.
- **Vitamin D**—A supplement may help if a deficiency is present.
- **Medication**—Antidepressants may be prescribed for severe cases.



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