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Managing the winter blues and Seasonal Affective Disorder



As colder weather and shorter days set in, **many people experience what's commonly known as the winter blues.** Symptoms include fatigue, sadness, difficulty concentrating and disrupted sleep. While these feelings are often mild and transient, they can sometimes escalate into a more severe condition known as Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD).

Understanding Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD)

Seasonal Affective Disorder is a type of depression that typically occurs during specific seasons, most commonly in fall and winter. Studies suggest that reduced sunlight during these months may disrupt the body's serotonin production, a neurotransmitter that regulates mood. This disruption can lead to symptoms such as mood changes, low energy levels, sleep disturbances, social withdrawal, body aches, increased appetite (often for carbohydrates) and weight gain.

Strategies for coping

While you can't change the season, there are several strategies to help manage symptoms of the winter blues and SAD:

- 1 Prioritize self-care. Maintain a balanced diet, get regular physical activity (especially cardiovascular exercise) and follow a consistent sleep schedule.
- 2 Seek social support. Stay connected with friends, family and your support network. Social interaction can help alleviate feelings of isolation.
- 3 Increase light exposure. Exposure to bright light can help regulate mood. Keep curtains and blinds open during daylight hours and consider using a light box lamp for 30 to 60 minutes each morning to simulate natural sunlight.
- 4 Spend time outdoors. Even in winter, spending time outside during daylight hours can boost mood and increase Vitamin D levels, which can help boost serotonin activity.
- 5 Explore new activities. Pursue creative hobbies and activities you enjoy. These can distract you from negative thoughts and provide a sense of accomplishment.
- 6 Consider supplements. Talk to your healthcare provider about Vitamin D supplements, as reduced sunlight exposure can lead to deficiencies that may exacerbate symptoms.
- 7 Limit stimulants. Reduce your caffeine and alcohol consumption, which can worsen anxiety and disrupt sleep patterns.
- 8 Seek professional help. Consult a healthcare provider if symptoms persist or worsen. They can guide therapy options, including light therapy or medication.

Implementing these strategies can help you effectively manage the winter blues and reduce the impact of SAD on your daily life.

Information adapted from [Seasonal Affective Disorder](#) and [Seasonal Affective Disorder video](#).

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