

Don't Sing the Winter Blues

Do the bleak winter months get you down? Do you tend to experience changes in appetite, sleep, mood, and energy during the fall and winter months? If so, you may have seasonal depression, also known as seasonal affective disorder, or SAD.

Facts about SAD

- It is more common among people who live far north or south of the equator
- Women are four times more likely to have SAD than men
- The average age of onset is 23 years, but it can impact people of any age
- It impacts about 5% of adults in U.S. – an additional 20% have some symptoms but do not meet diagnostic criteria

Hormones manufactured deep in the brain automatically trigger attitudinal changes at certain times of the year. Experts believe that SAD is related to these hormonal changes. One theory is that reduced sunlight during fall and winter leads to reduced production of serotonin in the brain. Serotonin produces a soothing, calming effect, but when levels drop, a person may experience feelings of depression, along with symptoms of fatigue, carbohydrate craving, and weight gain.

Do You Experience SAD?

Check all that apply to you:

- ☐ Decreased levels of energy
- ☐ Difficulty concentrating
- ☐ Fatigue
- ☐ Increase or decrease in appetite
- ☐ Increased desire to be alone
- ☐ Oversleeping
- ☐ Weight loss or weight gain
- ☐ Depression

How is SAD Diagnosed?

Your doctor may begin an evaluation by asking about your mood and changes in your thoughts or behavior. A physical examination may also be necessary to check for any underlying physical issues that could be linked to your depression. SAD is considered a subtype of depression and may be difficult to diagnose. Also, treatment options vary depending on the severity of the symptoms. If you experience symptoms of SAD, see your doctor or mental health provider. Do not try to diagnose or treat your symptoms yourself.



Coach's Quick Take

Not only do the winter blues leave you feeling down in the dumps, but they also send you rummaging for sweets. Don't get caught up in this vicious cycle. Try some fruit, nuts, and pomegranate or blueberry green tea to alleviate your cravings.

Can I Prevent SAD?

If you are concerned about your risk of SAD, are experiencing some of the symptoms, or have been diagnosed with SAD, here are some tips that may be helpful:

- Spend some time outside everyday. The effects of sunlight are beneficial, even when it is cloudy.
- Exercise for 30 minutes a day, 5 times a week.
- Stay involved with your social circle and regular activities. Social support is extremely important for those with mood disorders, especially during winter months.
- Subject yourself to bright indoor light. This is the most common treatment recommendation for seasonal affective disorder. A 300 watt bulb within three feet of you for 20 minutes three times a day can help, although the boost in serotonin may be temporary.



Which of the steps above will you implement to create a more positive mood and reduce your risk of developing SAD?

Work with your Wellness Coach to make a plan to prevent SAD and reach your health goals.

Shopping List Ideas:

- Popcorn
- Oatmeal
- Nuts
- Egg whites for omelets
- Peanut butter
- Prewashed veggies
- Fruit
- Salmon
- Cottage cheese

Fight Fatigue with Food

Combat extreme tiredness and intense cravings for sweets by keeping your pantry stocked with healthier options, such as the complex carbohydrates and protein-rich foods listed to the left. Limit simple carbohydrates, such as doughnuts, white rice and bread, which quickly raise and suddenly drop blood sugar levels. A “sugar crash” can cause fatigue, headache, and irritability—not good when you’re already struggling with the tiredness that comes with SAD.



RESOURCES

www.mayoclinic.com

www.webmd.com

www.eatingwell.com

For More Information visit
www.WellnessCoachesUSA.com