

Seasonal Affective Disorder

Some people experience a serious mood change during the winter months, when there is less natural sunlight. This condition is called seasonal affective disorder (SAD). SAD is a type of depression, and usually lifts during spring and summer. Some people experience symptoms severe enough to affect their quality of life, and 6 percent require hospitalization. SAD appears to be more common in Northern states.

Not everyone with SAD has the same symptoms. Common symptoms may include:

- Sad, anxious, or "empty" feelings
- Feeling hopeless
- Feeling guilty, worthless, or helpless
- Irritability and restlessness
- Loss of interest in activities
- Loss of energy
- Difficulty concentrating, remembering details and making decisions
- Difficulty falling sleeping or oversleeping
- Changes in weight
- Thoughts of death or suicide

SAD may be effectively treated with light therapy. But nearly half of people with SAD do not respond to light therapy alone. It is important to speak to your doctor about how you feel and determine the right treatment plan for you.

Here are a few tips on how you can manage SAD. Remember to speak with your doctor at any point about how you feel, and to determine the right treatment plan for you.

- Get enough sleep and practice good sleep habits
- Eat a healthy diet
- Try to exercise more often and find activities that make you happy
- Avoid alcohol and illegal drugs
- Talk with family and friends
- Stay active

When you are struggling with depression, talk about how you're feeling to someone you trust. Try to be around people who are caring and positive. Volunteer or get involved in group activities.

People who have had repeated seasonal depression should talk to a mental health care professional about prevention methods. Starting treatment during the fall or early winter, before the symptoms of SAD begin, may be helpful.