



## Ways to Manage Winter SAD (Seasonal Affective Disorder)

SAD is more than just the “winter blues.” Many of us can relate to feeling less energetic and upbeat in the darker months, but SAD is a form of depression. It doesn’t just affect adults – it can be a significant problem for young people. Below are tips to help a young person, or yourself, manage winter SAD.

**Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD)** is a form of depression in which someone experiences a significant change in mood when the seasons change. SAD typically occurs in the fall or winter, when there’s less sunlight, and improves in the spring/summer. While less common, some people experience summer SAD.

Watch Dr. Gene Beresin discuss winter SAD on The Weather Channel: <https://bit.ly/CC-SAD>

### Who’s at Greater Risk?

- Those who are female
- Those with a history of depression
- Those living in more northern locations, like Alaska or New England, where there are fewer daylight hours in winter

### Symptoms of SAD in Kids and Teens

- Feeling sad, crying spells
- Feeling hopeless
- Feeling excessively tired, sleeping more
- Changes in appetite, carbohydrate cravings
- Negative thinking, like thinking they’re worthless
- Suicidal ideation
- Episodes of self-harm
- *In younger kids:* any of the symptoms above, as well as tantrums, clingy behavior, stomach aches, headaches, oppositional or defiant behavior

### Prevention Techniques

- **Decrease stress.** This is important for mental wellness any time of year, but particularly if you’re prone to SAD.
- **Maintain a normal sleep routine.** Try to wake and go to bed at the same time every day. Avoid naps.
- **Limit caffeine.** This includes chocolate, soda, coffee.
- **Exercise in the morning,** instead of the afternoon or evening.
- **Eat more healthfully.** This increases serotonin precursors in your diet.
- **Avoid blue light from screens.** These lights suppress your melatonin, which suppresses your falling asleep, which increases sleep deprivation.

### Treatment Techniques

- **Vitamin D.** Get your child or teen outdoors! There’s evidence that a Vitamin D deficiency can contribute to SAD, so natural sunlight exposure may help. There are also Vitamin D supplements.
- **Light Therapy.** There are affordable light therapy boxes on the market. The lamp or box should deliver 10,000 lux (a measurement of light intensity). Use it for 20 to 30 minutes first thing every morning, keeping it about 16 to 24 inches from your face.
- **Psychotherapy.** Cognitive Behavior Therapy, for example, is a kind of behavioral therapy that helps to change negative thinking into positive thinking.
- **Medication.** Given SAD’s association with serotonin and norepinephrine, medicines that increase these neurotransmitters – such as SSRIs and bupropion – may help.

If you have any questions or concerns about winter SAD or the information above, talk about it with your child’s primary care doctor. They can help you decide if an evaluation is needed.

**Thanks for all you do to support a young person in your life. It really makes a difference.**

For more resources on depression, visit us online: [mghclaycenter.org/topic/depression](https://mghclaycenter.org/topic/depression)

