

# Managing Seasonal Affective Disorder

October is National Depression and Mental Health Screening Month. 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.

For more on Seasonal Affective Disorder, visit our website for National Depression and Mental Health Screening Month, [MagellanHealthcare.com/Mental-Health](https://www.MagellanHealthcare.com/Mental-Health), and be sure to check out the suicide prevention tip sheets and awareness campaign toolkit.

### **Sources**

- [Cleveland Clinic](#)
- [NIMH](#)