

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](#)