

WINTER IS COMING! BEAT THE WINTER BLUES

As the days grow shorter and temperatures drop, many people find themselves feeling more lethargic and down than usual. This phenomenon, known as seasonal affective disorder (SAD) or the winter blues, is a type of depression that occurs at a specific time of year, typically during colder months.

What is Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD)?

SAD is a mood disorder characterized by depression that occurs at the same time each year. While it can affect individuals during any season, it is most commonly associated with the winter months when there is less sunlight. The lack of sunlight can disrupt the body's internal clock (circadian rhythm), leading to feelings of sadness, fatigue, and hopelessness. It is more than just a case of the "winter blues" and can significantly impact one's daily life and overall well-being.

Symptoms of SAD

The symptoms of SAD can vary from mild to severe and often mirror those of major depression. They include:

- Persistent low mood
- Loss of interest in activities once enjoyed
- Low energy levels
- Sleep disturbances, such as oversleeping or difficulty waking up
- Changes in appetite or weight, particularly craving carbohydrates
- Difficulty concentrating
- Feelings of hopelessness or worthlessness
- Social withdrawal

In severe cases, individuals may experience thoughts of self-harm or suicide. It is crucial to recognize these symptoms and seek professional help if they persist.

Check out the next page for 10 ways to prevent & manage SAD!

10 WAYS TO PREVENT & MANAGE SAD

While the exact cause of seasonal affective disorder (SAD) is not fully understood, several strategies can help manage and alleviate its symptoms.

- **Light Therapy:** Light therapy is one of the most effective treatments for SAD. It involves sitting near a light therapy box that mimics natural sunlight, usually for about 30 minutes each morning. This can help regulate melatonin and serotonin levels, improving mood and energy.
- **Spend Time Outdoors:** Natural light can be beneficial, even on cloudy days. Try to spend time outside every day, whether it's taking a walk, sitting on a balcony, or simply opening curtains to let in as much natural light as possible.
- **Exercise Regularly:** Physical activity can boost serotonin levels and improve mood. Aim for at least 30 minutes of moderate exercise, such as walking, jogging, or yoga, most days of the week.
- **Maintain a Healthy Diet:** Eating a balanced diet rich in fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and lean proteins can help manage energy levels and prevent weight gain. Limit the intake of sugary and high-carbohydrate foods that can cause energy crashes.
- **Stay Connected:** Social support is crucial in combating depression. Make an effort to stay connected with friends and family through regular phone calls, video chats, or socially-distanced meetups.
- **Practice Stress-Relief Techniques:** Activities like meditation, deep breathing exercises, and mindfulness can reduce stress and improve mental well-being.
- **Establish a Routine:** Maintaining a consistent daily schedule can provide a sense of normalcy and stability. Set regular times for waking up, eating, exercising, and sleeping to help regulate your body's internal clock.
- **Engage in Hobbies:** Pursuing hobbies and activities that bring joy and fulfillment can distract from feelings of sadness and provide a sense of accomplishment and purpose. Whether it's reading, crafting, or playing an instrument, engaging in enjoyable activities is beneficial.
- **Plan Winter Vacations:** If possible, plan a winter vacation to a sunnier location. A change of scenery and increased exposure to sunlight can help alleviate symptoms of SAD and provide a much-needed break from the winter gloom.
- **Seek Professional Help:** If symptoms persist despite self-care measures, it is essential to seek help from a healthcare provider. Therapy, such as cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT), and medication can be effective in managing SAD.

By understanding the symptoms and taking proactive steps to manage them, individuals can reduce the impact of SAD and maintain their well-being throughout the winter months. If you or someone you know is struggling with SAD, don't hesitate to seek support from healthcare professionals.

WE CAN HELP.

Our hospital-based outpatient program is designed to meet the unique needs of older adults experiencing depression and/or anxiety related to life changes that are often associated with aging or a chronic diagnosis. Anyone can make a referral to our program, including self-referrals, provider referrals, or community consultations.

Call us today at