

# UNDERSTANDING & COPING WITH SEASONAL AFFECTIVE DISORDER

*Do you notice a significant shift in your mood when the days are shorter and darker? You could have Seasonal Affective Disorder.*

Common symptoms of Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD)

- Lack of energy
- Sleeping too much
- Overeating
- Gaining weight
- Social withdrawal

If you, your child, or someone you know are thinking about suicide or self-harm, contact the National Suicide & Crisis Lifeline by calling or texting 988, or go to the nearest hospital emergency room.

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## What is SAD?

Seasonal affective disorder (SAD) is not considered a separate disorder but is a type of depression characterized by its recurrent seasonal pattern, with symptoms lasting about 4–5 months per year. Signs and symptoms of SAD include those associated with major depression. SAD can occur in winter or summer, and some specific symptoms differ for winter-pattern and summer-pattern SAD.

## Daily habits & coping mechanisms

- **Take a walk with friends.** Too cold outside? Try walking at a mall or other indoor venue.
- **Practice small, individual exercises at home before or after work.** Online exercise videos are readily available for free on sites like YouTube.
- **Plan regular weekend outings with loved ones.** If you can't get together, chat over an audio or video call.
- **Keep a daily journal.** Ask yourself questions like "How am I feeling?" and "What is one thing that made me happy today?"

- **Speak with your healthcare provider.** They might recommend treatments such as using a light therapy lamp.
- **Monitor how your sleep, eating, and work or social activities impact your energy levels.**
  - Wake up and get out of bed at the same time each morning, weekdays or weekends.
  - Take note of how much you're eating and if you have frequent urges to eat more.

For more information on SAD please visit: [nimh.nih.gov/health/publications/seasonal-affective-disorder](https://nimh.nih.gov/health/publications/seasonal-affective-disorder)



## "Three good things."

Reach out – to a spouse, friend, family member or co-worker – and ask them to reflect with you at the end of every day on three good things, large or small, that happened. Doing this daily can counter depression and build emotional resilience.

## Seeking professional help

It's important to seek help if your symptoms start to interfere with things that matter to you. You should talk to a professional if:

- You have less interest in seeing people you normally like to see or less energy for activities you typically enjoy.
- You sleep through alarms and/or miss scheduled meetings.
- You notice you're being a lot harder on yourself.