



## SEASONAL AFFECTIVE DISORDER

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Seasonal Affective Disorder plagues an estimated 10 million Americans every year. Keep reading to understand seasonal depression and utilize Medcor's Guiding Health Principles to take care of your mental health this winter.

### WHAT IS SEASONAL AFFECTIVE DISORDER?

Seasonal Affective Disorder or SAD is a significant depression that typically starts in late fall or early winter and dissipates during spring and summer. Shorter and darker days mean your body will produce more melatonin, which can make you feel sluggish. Decreased daylight often correlates with a decrease in physical activity, and it doesn't take long for a sedentary lifestyle to start influencing your mood. The exact cause of SAD is unknown but is likely a combination of factors and is different for everyone.

### WHO STRUGGLES WITH SAD?

If you are already dealing with depression or anxiety, or you have a family history of depression, you are more likely to experience seasonal depression, but SAD also impacts people who haven't been

diagnosed with depression before. Reach out to your healthcare provider or therapist if you feel your symptoms getting worse, because they may recommend a temporary change in medication or more frequent appointments.

### WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS?

SAD produces symptoms that interfere with your ability to focus and complete daily tasks. Anyone can feel depressed at times, especially after traumatic events or big life changes. SAD is characterized by the following symptoms arising in late fall and early winter:

- › Feeling sad and hopeless
- › Decreased energy and fatigue
- › Excessive sleeping
- › Social avoidance

- › Craving unhealthy foods high in sugar
- › Weight gain
- › Suicidal thoughts

If you are experiencing severe symptoms lasting more than two weeks, you should reach out to your healthcare provider or a mental health professional to be evaluated for depression.

## GETTING HELP

It is not uncommon to go through periods of depression, but that does not mean you are supposed to suffer through it without any support. When dealing with significant depression, antidepressants and talk therapy prove to be a helpful combination for many. Medication helps with the physical symptoms and therapy helps you learn coping mechanisms for disruptive thoughts and new challenges that arise as you push through to the spring. For some people talk therapy is effective on its own and they don't require medication.

## SUPPORT FROM GUIDING HEALTH PRINCIPLES

**Eat real food.** You don't have to deny yourself tasty things, but make the effort to fill up on healthy and

nutritious food that fuels your body first, then enjoy a treat.

**Move your body.** When you are depressed it is hard to start exercising, so try setting a timer for just five or ten minutes at a time to do some low-impact exercises, and build up to doing 30 minutes of activity a day to boost your mood.

**Minding your happiness** is not easy when you are feeling down, but it helps to reserve time for self-care. Plan it in advance and look forward to treating yourself. Also, practice gratitude for the positive things in your life. Make yourself a reminder about something that is going well or something that always makes you smile. Even a small dose of positivity can make a difference on a day you are really struggling.

Practice all our **Guiding Health Principles** to take the best care of yourself, and reach out for support if you are still struggling with SAD symptoms. 988 is a U.S.-based Mental Health Emergency Hotline you can call or text to talk to someone now.

### References

1. [Seasonal Affective Disorder \(SAD\): More Than the Winter Blues \(nih.gov\)](#)
2. [Seasonal Affective Disorder | NCCIH \(nih.gov\)](#)
3. [Seasonal Affective Disorder | Psychology Today](#)