

Beyond the winter blues

Living with seasonal affective disorder



Many people experience mood shifts with the ebbs and flows of the seasons. When these shifts become severe and interfere with your daily life, you may be living with Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD). SAD is a common, recognized condition. Understanding this disorder and how to manage the symptoms can help you enjoy the best of what each season has to offer.

What is Seasonal Affective Disorder?

SAD is a form of depression that follows a seasonal pattern.¹ Usually, symptoms start late fall or early winter and end during the spring and summer. Less commonly, symptoms can start in the spring and summer months and end in fall and winter.

Common symptoms include:

- Feeling sad, hopeless, or down most of the day
- Loss of interest in activities you once enjoyed
- Low energy or fatigue
- Sleep issues — either oversleeping or trouble sleeping
- Changes in appetite or weight, especially craving carbs
- Difficulty concentrating
- Withdrawing from friends and family

You may find yourself dismissing these symptoms as “the winter blues” or “being off your routine.” When they start to interrupt your daily life and activities, however, it’s important to acknowledge their validity and to address them.

Managing your symptoms

Here are some proactive, evidence-based solutions that have been shown to reduce SAD symptoms and help people reclaim their well-being:

Lifestyle changes

Small changes and choices you make every day can have an impact on alleviating SAD symptoms.

- Spend time outdoors when there’s daylight — even on cloudy days
- Exercise regularly to boost energy and mood
- Stick to a routine for sleep, meals, and social interaction
- Eat nourishing foods and watch for sugar cravings
- Practice mindfulness or gentle stress-relief techniques
- Reach out to loved ones — connection combats isolation
- Limit alcohol and avoid recreational drugs

Light therapy

One of the most effective treatments for winter-pattern SAD is daily use of a light therapy box.¹ These boxes mimic natural sunlight and can help regulate your body's internal clock. Most people sit in front of the box for 20 to 30 minutes each morning. Benefits are often felt within 1 to 2 weeks. Continued daily use through winter helps prevent symptom return.

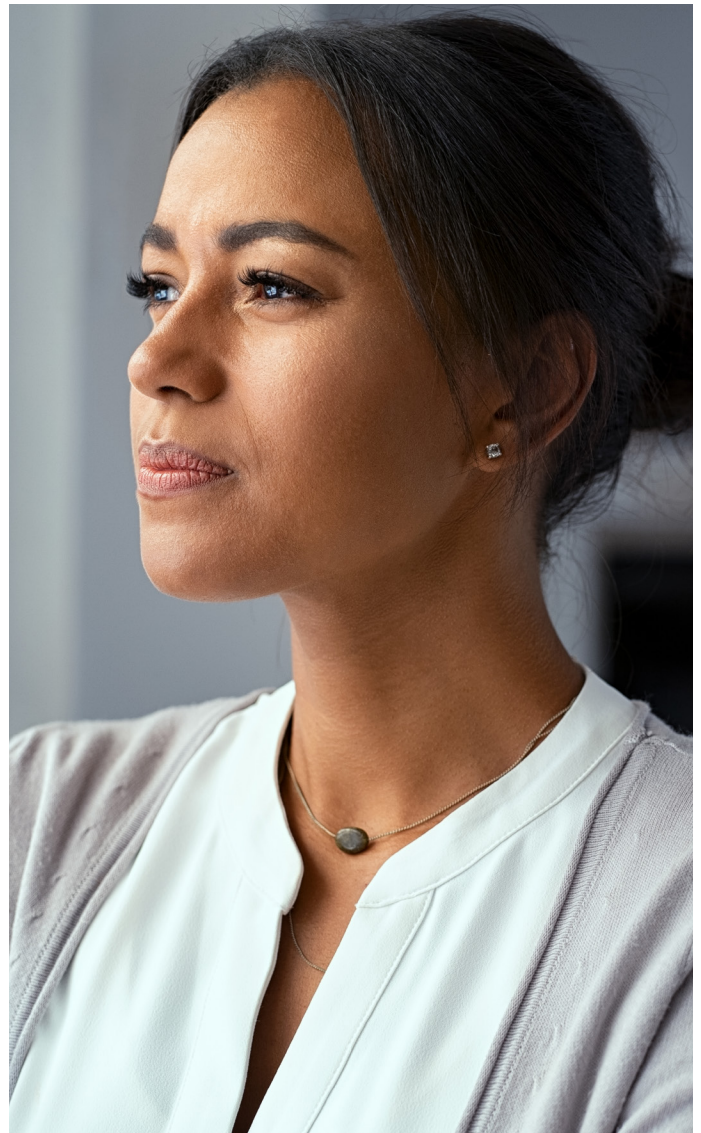
Professional treatment

Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT)-SAD is a type of talk therapy that helps you shift negative thoughts and build healthy behaviors — even when motivation feels low.² In clinical trials, CBT has shown results comparable to light therapy, with some evidence that its benefits last longer into future seasons.

Your care provider may recommend an antidepressant to treat SAD. In fact, bupropion (Wellbutrin XL) is FDA-approved to help prevent SAD when taken in the fall before symptoms begin.² Medications may take several weeks to reach full effect and are often used alongside other therapies.

You're not alone

Whether SAD is something you've faced for years or something you're just beginning to recognize, there is help. You deserve to seek that help. Start with your care provider. They know your health needs best and can work with you to form a plan of action. From there, you can take steps each day to work toward a healthier, happier you no matter the season.



Need help finding a care provider?

Use [Find Care](#) to locate in-network providers with new personalized matching capabilities, which connects you to high-quality, cost-effective care tailored to your health needs.



¹ National Institute of Mental Health: *Seasonal Affective Disorder* (accessed September 2, 2025): [nimh.nih.gov](https://www.nimh.nih.gov).

² The Mayo Clinic: *Seasonal affective disorder (SAD)* (December 14, 2021): [mayoclinic.org](https://www.mayoclinic.org).

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