



Fighting the Winter Blues

What you Need to Know About Depression and Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD)

If you feel down during the winter months, you're not alone. Colder weather, shorter days and less sunlight can have a dramatic effect on your mood and your overall sense of well-being. For many people, participating in mood-enhancing activities is a great way to keep your spirits up when the temperatures are down.

Such activities may include:

- Spending time outside to get some daytime sunshine.
- Sitting near windows to soak up the sunlight.
- Getting active. Whether indoors or out, participate in an activity that get your body moving.
- Keeping warm with warm clothes, shoes, food and drinks.
- Eating a healthy, balanced diet.
- Learning something new or pick-up an old hobby.
- Listening to music that makes you happy.
- Visiting with friends and family.

If you are experiencing extreme sadness, you may be suffering from seasonal affective disorder (SAD), a type of clinical depression that comes and goes with the season.

According to the National Institute of Mental Health, depression symptoms to be aware of include:

- Feeling depressed most of the day, nearly every day
- Feeling hopeless or worthless
- Having low energy

- Losing interest in activities you once enjoyed
- Having problems with sleep
- Experiencing changes in your appetite or weight
- Feeling sluggish or agitated
- Having difficulty concentrating
- Having frequent thoughts of death or suicide.

In addition, symptoms of SAD may include:

- Having low energy
- Excessive daytime sleepiness
- Overeating
- Weight gain
- Craving for carbohydrates
- Social withdrawal (feel like "hibernating")

SAD can affect people of all ages, although it is more common in women. It is also more common in people with a family history of SAD, as well as those with depression or bipolar disorder. People living further from the equator – where there is less sunlight in the winter – are also at greater risk of SAD.

If you are experiencing these symptoms, don't be embarrassed or ashamed to seek help. Contact your physician right away. SAD is treatable. Treatments may include: medication, light therapy, psychotherapy and/or Vitamin D. These may be used alone or in combination.