



Depression: Seasonal affective disorder

Some people have serious mood changes during the winter. This happens when there is less sunlight. The condition is called seasonal affective disorder (SAD). It is also called the “winter blues.” SAD is a type of depression. It often goes away in spring and summer. Some symptoms affect quality of life.

Six percent of people living with this disorder need a hospital stay. SAD is more common in northern states.

Not everyone has the same symptoms. Symptoms may include feeling:

- Sad.
- Anxious.
- "Empty."
- Hopeless.
- Guilty.
- Worthless.
- Helpless.
- Irritable.
- Restless.

Some people may:

- Lose interest in activities.
- Lose energy.

Some people have problems with:

- Concentrating.
- Remembering details.
- Making decisions.
- Sleeping.
- Oversleeping.
- Weight changes.
- Thoughts of death or suicide.

Light therapy is one way to treat this disorder. Nearly half the people living with SAD do not respond to light therapy alone. Talk to your doctor about how you feel. So you can get the right treatment plan.

Here are tips to manage this disorder. Be sure to talk to your doctor about how you feel.

- Get enough sleep.
- Practice good sleep habits.
- Eat healthy foods.

- Exercise more often.
- Find activities that make you happy.
- Avoid alcohol and illegal drugs.
- Talk with family and friends.
- Stay active.
- Talk about your feelings with someone you trust.
- Try to be around caring and positive people.
- Volunteer.
- Get involved in group activities.

Do you have SAD symptoms every year? Talk to a mental health care professional.

There may be ways to prevent SAD from impacting your quality of life. Start treatment during the fall or early winter. Do this before the symptoms begin.

This document is for your information only. It is not meant to give medical advice. It should not be used to replace a visit with a provider. Magellan Health does not endorse other resources that may be mentioned here.