



## A Quick Guide to Beating SAD and the Winter Blues

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Shorter days and less sunlight in the winter months can be difficult for many people to manage. [Seasonal affective disorder](#) (SAD) is a form of depression that impacts about 5% of adults in the U.S. and can last for up to 40% of the year. It typically brings feelings of sadness, reduced energy, and low motivation which can make it hard to carry out everyday tasks or make changes in your daily routines. Even if you don't experience significant SAD that requires professional treatment, you may have less severe "winter blues" that are still bothersome and make it harder to function during the winter months. The good news is that there are some easy ways to combat these symptoms. Here are some evidence-based tips to help you navigate the cold and dark wintertime:

- **Expose yourself to light.** Getting extra light has shown to be particularly helpful in combating seasonal affective disorder. There are different types of [light therapy](#) available. Some easy ways to expose yourself to light in the winter include taking walks outside, sitting near windows, or investing in a SAD lamp. Experts recommend 10,000 lux of light for about 30 minutes in the morning, working up to 60 minutes if needed.
- **Utilize social support.** [Being around others](#) can help boost your mood and engage your brain. People who feel more isolated have an earlier onset of depression and anxiety symptoms in the winter. Try texting or calling a different friend each week, setting up monthly activities with family or friends, exploring interests that involve being around others, or joining a support group.
- **Exercise.** [Engaging in exercise](#) helps reduce stress hormones, boosts mood, improves sleep, and enhances focus and attention. Exercise has shown particular benefit in the winter months in combating seasonal depression. The key is to find a way to exercise that is fun for you. This might be going for walks, following exercise videos at home, or just incorporating more movement into your daily routine (e.g., taking the stairs at work).
- **Eat healthy.** In addition to the physical health benefits, [nutritious eating](#) has also been shown to improve depressive symptoms. A diet consisting of fruits and vegetables, fibrous foods, fish, whole grains, and beans seems to provide the most benefit, coupled with limiting sugar and processed foods. Some easy ways to eat healthy

include cooking at home rather than getting takeout, adding a fruit or vegetable to every meal, and replacing sugary drinks with water.

- **Drink green tea.** [Green tea](#) contains the amino acid L-theanine, which has been shown to improve mood and sleep and reduce stress. Green tea can be found online or at your local grocery store.
- **Notice what's good about the winter season.** Whether it's participating in winter sports or staying cozy indoors with a blanket and cup of cocoa, look for opportunities to enjoy the season in whatever way works for you.

SAD and winter blues are no fun, but there are many ways to help yourself feel better until longer days and warmer temperatures return. Take care of yourself now so you'll be in great shape to enjoy springtime when it arrives.

*Talk to someone who can help! To find a licensed psychologist near you, use PPA's Psychologist Locator at <https://www.papsy.org/locator>. For information on other topics related to mental health, go to <https://www.papsy.org>, click on "Resources" and then "Public Resources".*