

### **Tips to Reduce Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD)**

Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD) starts during adulthood and worsens as an individual grows older. According to the [Mayo Clinic](#), seasonal affective disorder is a type of depression that occurs due to changes in season. Seasonal affective disorder is different for individuals depending on their symptoms before the seasonal changes. The *Mayo Clinic* mentions that the specific causes of seasonal affective disorder are unknown. Still, some factors that could play a significant part are changes in time for daylight savings, serotonin levels, and melatonin levels. The reduced level of sunlight during the shorter fall and winter days may disrupt the body's internal clock, and levels of sleep leading to feelings of depression. During shorter winter days changes in serotonin and melatonin can occur. A drop in serotonin, a brain chemical that acts as a mood stabilizer, could play a role in the disorder because it affects the moods of individuals. Melatonin is also essential because it plays a role in our sleep patterns. The following are signs and symptoms of seasonal affective disorder.

#### **Symptoms:**

- Lost of interest in daily activities
- Feeling hopeless or worthless
- Frequent thoughts of suicide
- Difficulty concentrating
- Anti-social

#### **Fall & Winter:**

- Low on energy
- Appetite increases
- Weight gain
- Oversleeping
- Feeling sad/moody

#### **Spring & Summer:**

- Insomnia
- Depression
- Poor appetite
- Weight loss
- Feelings of anxiety and agitation

Seasonal affective disorder can be diagnosed by a health care provider or a mental health specialist by expressing any of the symptoms listed above. According to the [Mayo Clinic](#), the disorder can also be diagnosed with physical exams, lab tests, and psychological evaluations. Although the depressive episodes and symptoms must occur during a specific season for at least two years; therefore, please note that not all adults diagnosed with seasonal affective disorder experience the listed symptoms.

As previously mentioned, this disorder is a specific type of depression that is more apparent in older adults. As older adults are more likely to be isolated due to fewer social connections and gatherings with family and friends due to health-related issues or mobility impairments during

the winter season. As a result, they are more likely to become diagnosed with the disorder. Women are also more probable to be diagnosed with this condition compared to men.

According to the [Mayo Clinic](#), there is no specific way to prevent the development of the seasonal affective disorder. However, early steps can be taken to manage the symptoms before they worsen over time. As reported by the [National Institute of Mental Health \(NIH\)](#), four main types of treatments for the disorder can include light therapy, psychotherapy, antidepressant medications, and vitamin D. Other treatable ways that older adults can consider in their daily routine is the following:

- Spend time with family and friends
- Eat a balanced diet by consuming lean proteins, fruits, and vegetables
- Eliminate sugary foods, sodas, and sweets
- Commit to at least 30 minutes of daily exercise, e.g., walking, swimming, & chair yoga
- Limit the intake of alcohol to one or two glasses per week
- Make home environment sunnier and brighter
- Normalize sleep patterns

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