

Feeling Blue or SAD? (Seasonal Affective Disorder)

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Colder temperatures, snow, loss of daylight, and more time spent inside can challenge our moods during the wintertime in New England. Feeling more tired or a bit down during the winter months is fairly common; it is known as the “winter blues”¹

The main catalyst for the change in our mood comes from the lack of sun. The loss of natural light can cause:

- less serotonin [neurotransmitter that regulates our mood]
- changes in your sleep-wake cycle
- changes in levels of melatonin [a hormone that impacts our mood and sleep]

The “winter blues” do not typically influence your ability to enjoy your life. You may feel a little less social, a bit sad and tired, and/or have some trouble sleeping. If you notice the blues impacting your work, relationships, social life, sense of self-worth, school, etc., you may have Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD).¹ The symptoms of SAD are more intense, last from the onset of fall throughout winter, and interfere with daily living. Behaviors associated with SAD include:

- sleeping too much
- feeling depressed almost every day all day
- changes in hunger
- withdrawing from activities and people you typically enjoy
- feeling hopeless about the future
- struggling to focus and perform.^{1,2}

As you can understand, SAD is much more than simply: staying in to watch movies at night, dreading another snowstorm, or wishing for spring. SAD is a type of depression¹. Consult your physician if you are unsure if you have the winter blues or SAD. Taking care of your mental health is like taking care of the flu or a persistent cold this season. You would go see a doctor! Mental health is exactly the same, an important part of a healthy life!

Here are a few ways you can manage the winter blues or SAD^{1,2}:

- Make and stick to plans with friends/family
- Eat healthy foods: proteins (fish, lean grass-fed meats, low-fat dairy, legumes including beans, peas and nuts), fruits, whole grains, vegetables
- Get outside: natural light will boost serotonin levels and how you feel. Play with your kids outside, try ice-skating or skiing, take a walk outside, even if it's only for 10 minutes!
- Exercise: we boost our mood with an increase of serotonin and endorphins from exercise. Try a fitness class, yoga, walk with a friend, join a gym (most have deals this month), play with your children or grandchildren.
- Create a sleep and wake schedule
- Rearrange furniture in your home to face the windows/natural light
- Grow some greenery: add plants and flowers to your indoor spaces

For more information

[Call Your EAP for FREE](#)

[Foods to Beat the Winter Blues](#)

[Seasonal Affect Disorder](#)

[Mental Health Services](#)

[The Difference Between SAD and “Winter Blues”](#)

[Winter Sleeping Tips](#)

Resources

1 <https://www.rush.edu/health-wellness/discover-health/more-just-winter-blues>

2 <http://thenationshealth.aphapublications.org/content/29/1/22>

