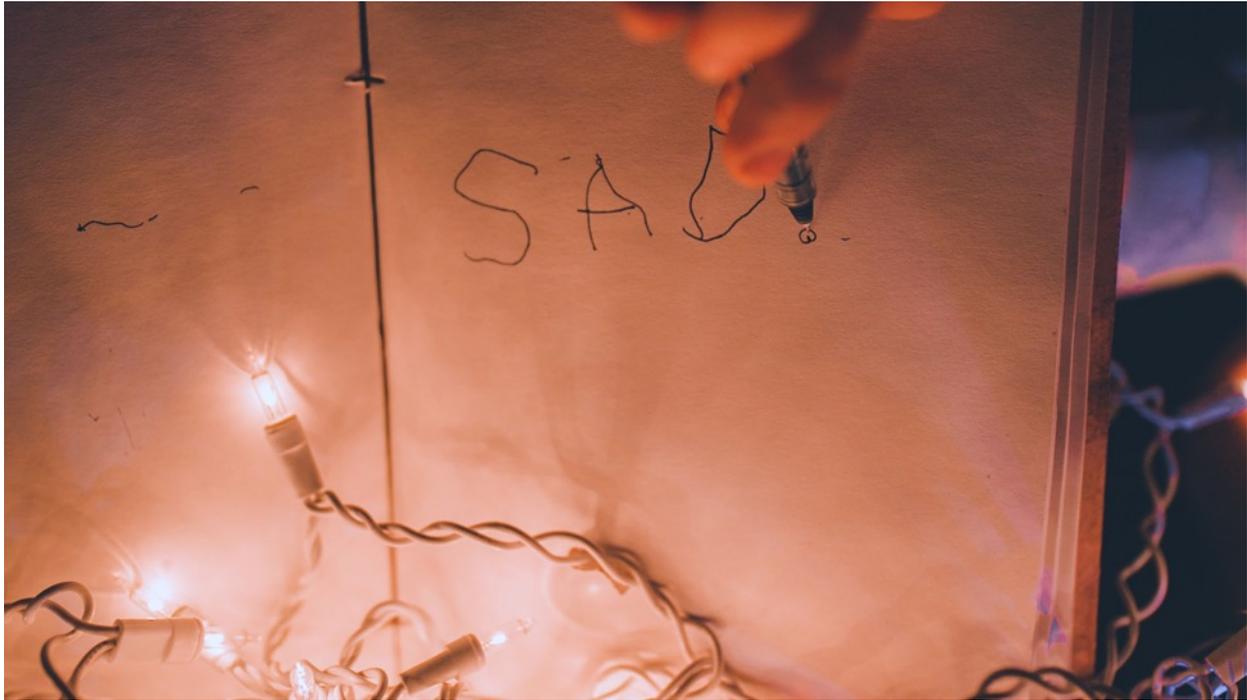


How to Handle Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD) at Home



By Eileen Wittig

Seasonal Affective Disorder, or SAD, has been making its way into pop culture and your average seasonal conversation. It's a mood disorder associated with anxiety and depression episodes caused by the brain's chemical reaction to changes in light and temperature. Even if you don't have depression throughout the year, you may find yourself feeling suddenly overwhelmed, inexplicably sad, exhausted for no apparent reason, or like taking abnormal risks during the winter months.

If you're looking ahead to the coming cold months with dread, here are some things you can do at home to help alleviate the symptoms of SAD:

- **Know that you're not alone.** Roughly 5% of the US population experiences seasonal depression.

- **Try a “happy lamp.”** You may have heard of light therapy, sun lamps, or “happy lamps.” These are lamps with special bulbs that mimic the sun’s natural light. They have proved effective in up to 85% of diagnosed SAD cases, and are available in a range of prices at most home goods stores, as well as Amazon. Look for one that has as little UV light as possible and 10,000-lux light intensity.
- **Keep a regular sleep schedule,** even with the shorter days. Disrupting your normal sleep pattern, even by sleeping longer than usual, can throw off your internal clock and contribute to stress and symptoms of depression.
- **Maintain healthy eating habits.** Cold months make us want to load up on comfort foods, but healthy eating is important for both emotional and mental health. Balance the influx of cookies, pies, and eggnog with winter vegetables and water.
- **Plan something to look forward to every day.** Whether it’s grabbing coffee with a friend, planning a particularly good lunch, watching an episode of a comedy show, or wearing an outfit that makes you feel confident, think of something to get you excited to get out of bed, before you even go to sleep the night before.
- **Stay active.** The idea of going outside, or even moving much at all, isn’t always a happy thought when it’s cold out. But exercise releases feel-good chemicals, like serotonin, dopamine, and endorphins, as well as testosterone, which can give you more energy and combat mood swings.
- **Practice mindfulness.** Mindfulness is calming and centering, which can be useful during cold-weather anxiety or depressive episodes. When you feel your mood start to sink, try stretching, a simple yoga flow, or meditating. Or, if you don’t have much time or privacy, try taking a quick walk, looking at nature for a moment, playing music that either soothes or energizes you, or doing something tactile like squeezing a stress ball or putting on a cozy sweater.
- **Don’t be afraid to ask for help.** Seek counseling or therapy if you need some help handling your mood or symptoms. Since SAD is a chemical reaction in the brain, having a professional diagnosis and plan may be helpful.

Eileen Wittig is the Marketing Associate at Headway. She is thrilled to use her writing and research experience to help serve the emotional and mental health needs of as many people as possible.