

# Help for seasonal depression

November 14 2017, by Julie Davis, Healthday Reporter

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(HealthDay)—As many as 20 percent of Americans get the winter blues when days grow shorter.

For instance, you might feel blue around the holidays because of stress or if loved ones are far away. It's usually mild and clears up on its own in a short amount of time.

But up to 6 percent of the population experiences the serious mood change during [winter](#) months called seasonal affective disorder, or SAD. This type of depression goes away in the spring, but comes back year after year.

Unlike the winter blues, SAD is a medical condition directly related to the lack of daylight. It's more common in women and in northern parts of the country, where there's less sunshine and winter is more desolate.

Common SAD symptoms include:

- Deep sadness or anxiety.
- Hopelessness or helplessness.
- Irritability.
- Loss of interest in favorite activities.
- Fatigue or lack of energy.
- Difficulty with concentration, memory and decision-making.
- Sleep problems.
- Changes in weight.
- Suicidal thoughts.

SAD is often treated with [light](#) therapy. This involves simply sitting in front of a high-intensity light box for about 30 minutes once a day.

Antidepressants are another option. But the talk therapy called cognitive behavioral therapy, or CBT, may help the most. You'll learn to identify and stop negative thought patterns and find social outlets to renew your interest in life. Research shows that CBT does a better job of reducing

depression and keeping SAD from returning than light [therapy](#).

If you're feeling beyond blue this winter, talk to your doctor. While SAD goes away on its own, there's no reason to live with it through a long winter.

**More information:** The American Academy of Family Physicians has a detailed description of SAD, including [its causes](#) and how it's diagnosed.

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Citation: Help for seasonal depression (2017, November 14) retrieved 4 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2017-11-seasonal-depression.html>

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