

Seasonal depression: Small things you can do every day to cope

October 25 2022, by Jolanta Burke and Annie Curtis



Credit: AI-generated image ([disclaimer](#))

Many of us tend to feel sad or not like our usual self as autumn and winter approach. But for some, these feelings persist until spring arrives.

Known as [seasonal affective disorder](#) (or Sad), it's a type of depression that occurs only during specific seasons. Alongside persistent low mood,

some people may find they feel more lethargic than usual, have difficulty getting up in the morning and crave more carbs than normal.

If you're someone who has Sad (or think you might), here are a few things you can do to improve your mood during the colder months.

What to do every day

Since Sad happens during seasons when the days are shorter and we get less sunlight, it's thought to be caused by a disruption of our body clocks (also known as circadian-rhythm disturbance). We all have a "[master clock](#)" in the brain that uses daylight to control all of our body's processes—from hunger to when we feel ready for bed.

Circadian rhythm disturbance has been linked to sleep disturbances, changes in mood and our eating patterns and metabolism, all of which are [affected by Sad](#).

This is why getting outside and into [natural daylight](#) can be so important for people who have Sad.

In the morning, aim to get outside for at least a few minutes. Since light sends direct signals to your master body clock to tell it it's time to wake up, [morning light](#) will help you feel more alert throughout the day. It may also help you [fall asleep earlier in the evening](#).

At lunch, try again to get outside and get more natural light exposure. But if you can't get outside or it's overcast, you may want to try bright-light therapy. This exposes people to bright fluorescent light using a special lamp or mask. Research shows that 30 minutes of bright light therapy daily can [help reduce symptoms of Sad](#).

If you find it difficult to convince yourself to get away from your desk at

lunchtime, try to organize some activities to do that may help you get outside. For example, try to organize a [daily lunchtime group walk](#) with your colleagues or neighbors. Alongside getting you out into the daylight, exercising in a group can also boost [positive emotions and connectedness](#), which is good for well-being and mental health.

Another activity you could try during your lunchtime walk is the "[three good things in nature](#)" task. The aim of this activity is to boost mindfulness and appreciation of nature by taking note of at least three things from the natural environment while you're on your daily walk. Not only will this get you outside, it may also help improve your mood and well-being.

In the evenings, aim to set aside time to do things you enjoy. This may help to improve your mood and may ease some symptoms of Sad.

Other things you can do during winter months to improve your mood include:

Practice humor

[Introducing more humor into your life](#) may help balance out your [negative emotions](#) and could even improve [sleep quality](#), mood and reduce symptoms of depression.

In the evening, take ten minutes to think of some [funny things](#) that happened during the day. Or think of a [challenging situation](#) you faced and instead try to think about how you'd deal with it in a funny way in the future. Making the time to [watch something funny](#) on TV three or four times a week may also help to boost your mood.

Find a hobby

Start a new hobby or pick up one you haven't practiced for a while.

Engaging in a hobby will keep your mind less idle and more engaged, leaving you with less time to ruminate, if that's something you tend to do. Perhaps try [learning to knit](#). This is associated with increased mindfulness, calmness and a boost of [positive emotions](#). Mastering [new recipes](#) may also be a great way of boosting well-being.

It doesn't matter what hobby you choose, as long as it stretches your skills and helps you get into a [state of flow](#). This is the feeling of "losing yourself" in what you're doing and is a major component in experiencing [subjective happiness](#). You might not feel better while you are doing your hobby (as it requires concentration), but as soon as you complete your task, you will experience a sense of accomplishment and a boost of positive emotions.

Keep your body clock in rhythm

Since Sad is thought to be caused by circadian-rhythm disturbance, keeping your circadian rhythm in time may help to reduce symptoms of Sad.

Sleep plays a big role in keeping your body clock in check. So in the evenings, try to avoid too much bright light as this will [delay your sleep](#). You should also try to keep similar times for going to sleep and waking up both during the week and on weekends. Alongside proper sleep, eating your meals at regular times may also help to keep your body clock in time.

While it may be normal to feel a dip in your [mood](#) after the clocks first change, if you're finding that symptoms are lingering for many weeks or are having a big effect on your life, you may want to speak to your doctor. In the meantime, remember that even just a few small changes every day may help keep Sad symptoms at bay.

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