



# *Great Changes* Mental Health Monthly

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## Seasonal Affect Disorder

Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD) is a type of depression triggered by seasonal changes, most commonly starting in late fall/early winter and ending in spring, driven by reduced sunlight, [altered serotonin/melatonin levels](#), and biological clock shifts. Key symptoms include low energy, oversleeping, weight gain, carbohydrate cravings, and social withdrawal. Risk factors include living far from the equator, having a family history of depression, or being female. [National Institute of Mental Health \(NIMH\) \(.gov\) +6](#)

### Symptoms of Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD)

- Persistent Sadness: Feelings of depression, hopelessness, or worthlessness.
- Low Energy & Fatigue: Feeling tired, sluggish, or "slowed down" despite adequate sleep.
- Sleep Changes: Oversleeping is common, though some may experience insomnia.
- Appetite Changes: Carbohydrate cravings, overeating, and subsequent weight gain.
- Social Withdrawal: Loss of interest in activities previously enjoyed and a tendency to "hibernate".



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- Cognitive Issues: Difficulty concentrating or making decisions. [National Institute of Mental Health \(NIMH\) \(.gov\) +4](#)

### Causes of SAD

- Reduced Sunlight: Lower sunlight levels in fall/winter can disrupt the body's internal clock (circadian rhythm) and reduce serotonin, a neurotransmitter that affects mood.
- Melatonin Changes: The body may produce higher levels of melatonin, a sleep-related hormone, during darker, shorter days.
- Vitamin D Deficiency: Lower levels of sun exposure may result in decreased Vitamin D, which is linked to depression. [Johns Hopkins Medicine +4](#)

### Types of Seasonal Affective Disorder

- Winter-Pattern SAD (Winter Blues): The most common form, starting in late fall/early winter and lifting in spring.
- Summer-Pattern SAD: A less common form, with depression beginning in late spring or early summer. [National Institutes of Health \(.gov\) +1](#)

### Treatments

- [Light Therapy](#): Using a light box that mimics natural sunlight.
- [Psychotherapy](#): Cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT).



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- [Medication](#): Antidepressants.
- [Vitamin D Supplements](#): May improve symptoms. [nhs.uk +3](#)

Call Great Changes for help assessing and addressing SAD.