

In this month's newsletter:

Seasonal Affective Disorder

November

Self help tips for seasonal affective disorder

Also known as 'SAD' or the 'winter blues', seasonal affective disorder is a form of depression, which according to the NHS affects around **2 million people** in the UK.

Although seasonal affective disorder can cause symptoms during other seasons, it tends to affect most people during the winter months.

Despite the exact causes not being known, it's thought that fewer hours of daylight may disrupt your internal body clock, which could in turn negatively impact your mood-regulating hormones.

Symptoms of SAD include:

- Difficulty concentrating
- Problems with sleep
- Persistent low mood
- Becoming withdrawn
- Loss of pleasure in everyday activities
- Feeling increasingly irritable, agitated, and tearful
- Lack of energy and feeling lethargic
- An increased craving for foods that are high in carbohydrates
- Loss of interest in sex or physical contact
- Suicidal feelings

For those who have existing mental health problems, these may get worse when experiencing SAD.

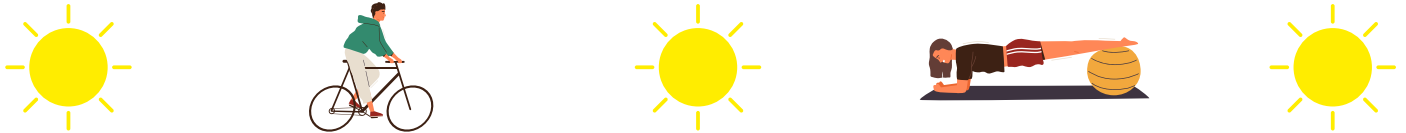
These symptoms may not be easy to live with, but there are things you can do to help manage it.

Here are five self-help tips to help manage the symptoms of SAD, that will still be beneficial to your overall wellbeing if you do not suffer with the disorder:

1. Try to eat a balanced and nutritious diet: Foods that are high in fats and carbohydrates can negatively impact our mood and energy levels, so it's important to try and maintain a balanced diet, especially in the winter months when overindulging is more likely to occur. You can visit the NHS website to find out more about the foods that make up a healthy balanced diet.



2. Get outdoors in natural sunlight and keep active: During the winter months, it's easier to find ourselves spending more time indoors but getting outdoors and keeping physically active is important as it promotes better quality sleep, reduces stress and anxiety, and helps to boost your mood. A lack of exposure to natural light can lead to a lack of serotonin but physical activity increases its production and helps to counteract it.



3. Stick to a schedule: Our body's internal clock (known as circadian rhythm) can become disrupted during winter. As a result our daily functions, especially sleep patterns, can become unsettled and contribute to symptoms of SAD. That's why attempting to stick to a structured sleep schedule is really important. Sticking to the same bed time and wake up time each day, and considering good sleep hygiene practices such as limiting caffeine and technology consumption in the evenings will help to sync our body clock to wintertime and achieve a more restful sleep.



4. Stay connected: The temptation to remain indoors during the colder months can restrict our opportunities for social interaction, but maintaining positive relationships with other people is necessary for positive mental health. Try arranging regular opportunities to connect with others, even if it has to be remotely.



5. Explore light therapy: Not only do we lack serotonin in the winter months, we also experience an uptake in melatonin due to our lack of exposure to natural light. Melatonin is a hormone that can make us feel sleepy and lethargic, but using light therapy boxes can help to combat this. Light therapy boxes mimic natural light and have been proven to help reduce the symptoms related to SAD. They may be particularly useful if you work in an area with little exposure to natural light or if your opportunities to get outside are limited.





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Unfortunately stereotypes and societal expectations can sometimes discourage men from expressing their feelings or reaching out for help with when it comes to their mental health. The international men's health movement, Movember, are trying to combat this by working towards a world where men take action to be mentally well, and are supported by those around them.

It's a sign of strength and courage to seek help for mental health, so we wanted to share some steps men can take to empower themselves and learn healthy coping mechanisms for the challenges they face in day-to-day life.

1. The best place to start is by developing your self-awareness. Being able to recognise your own thoughts, feelings and behaviours and acknowledging how they affect you and others around you, allows you to better manage them. Journaling, meditating, or talking with people who understand you deeply are great ways to practice self-awareness.

2. Building a strong support network is crucial for your mental wellbeing, so reach out and connect with family members, friends, colleagues, or other trusted people. Sharing your thoughts and feelings with someone you trust will offer you a different perspective on the challenges you're facing.

3. Set realistic goals and celebrate your accomplishments no matter how small they may seem. Break down tasks into smaller, manageable steps as achieving those goals can boost your sense of purpose and self-esteem.

4. Be compassionate to yourself. It's common for men to place high expectations on themselves, which can increase stress and lead to self-criticism. Treat yourself with the same patience and compassion as you would a friend facing similar challenges.

5. Seek professional help. It's perfectly ok to require more help than just self-care. If your mental health is having an impact on your everyday life and is not getting better, it's a good idea to **make an appointment with your GP**. This will allow you to access the support you need and treatment options best suited to you.

You can visit the **Movember website** to access helpful resources and more information on men's mental health and other health issues affecting men.