

Feeling SAD? Here are ways to ease winter blues

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(HealthDay)—The COVID-19 pandemic can make mental health struggles even worse for some people with seasonal affective disorder (SAD).

SAD is a type of depression triggered by the shorter daylight hours and gray skies of winter. It causes symptoms such as overeating, [social withdrawal](#) and decreased [energy](#).

Pandemic-related effects such as stress, anxiety and social isolation could make SAD even worse for some people, according to Dr. Drew Pate, chief of psychiatry at LifeBridge Health, a health care corporation in Baltimore.

He offered some advice for people with SAD. No. 1 on his list: Get as much exposure to sunlight as you can.

"Open your curtains and blinds in the morning and position yourself near windows at work if you can," Pate suggested in a LifeBridge news release.

"Exposing yourself to [natural light](#) early in the day,

even [light](#) on a cloudy day, can help improve your [mood](#) and [energy level](#)."

If possible, sit outside during work breaks, Pate recommended. And, he added, consider using a light therapy box.

"Using a light therapy box in the morning soon after waking up can have dramatic effects on your mood and energy level throughout the day," Pate said.

Here are some other coping strategies:

- **Be active.** "Regular exercise and activity can be especially powerful in combating low moods and low energy," but be sure to follow social distancing rules, Pate said.
- **Maintain consistent schedules.** Go to bed and wake up at the same times daily, and stick to a mealtime schedule, Pate advised. "Consistent routines will help keep your mood on track and ensure your mind and body's need for appropriate rest and nutrition is met so that you can address other potential causes of worsening mood or low energy," he said.
- **Stay connected.** Isolation "can be a major contributor to worsening mood and energy level," and increased [social isolation](#) and disconnection during the pandemic "are harmful to our overall well-being," Pate said. In-person interaction may not be possible, but you can phone, text or have video chats.
- **Relax and do things you enjoy.** Set aside time for self-care and activities.

If your mood or energy still aren't improving, consider seeking professional help, Pate advised.

More information: The U.S. National Institute of Mental Health has more on [SAD](#).

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