



**JANUARY 2023**  
**WINTER WELLNESS**

## CARE CONNECTION

### THERAPIST-APPROVED WAYS TO DEAL WITH SEASONAL DEPRESSION

Seasonal affective disorder (SAD), also known as seasonal depression, is brought on by the changing seasons. Most people, when first dealing with it, aren't sure how to cope with seasonal depression, as it can be overwhelming and jarring. They begin feeling sapped of energy and interest during the fall, and their condition continues to worsen as winter progresses. The depressive symptoms typically self-resolve during the springtime and remain minimal throughout the summer months. It is also important to remember that winter depression or winter blues is a lesser form of SAD.



Researchers are not yet sure what exactly causes seasonal affective disorder, but some of its prevalent markers include:

- Daily depression that occurs in a seasonal pattern
- Lacking interest in previously enjoyed activities
- Weight gain & changes in appetite
- Lacking energy & feeling constantly tired
- Excessive sleeping

Left untreated, seasonal affective disorder symptoms can lead to chronic mental health problems. Fortunately, there are a number of therapist-approved techniques for knowing how to deal with seasonal depression. Use the tips below to learn to recognize, prevent, and alleviate SAD symptoms:

- **Talk with a Mental Health Provider.** If you suffer from seasonal affective disorder, working with a mental health care provider can be a huge asset. A skilled provider can teach you how to fight seasonal depression before, during, and after its occurrence. Talk therapy and cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) are both effective in treating SAD, and success rates are high. There's always hope for healing. One of the most convenient ways to do therapy is online through **Talkspace**, which is offered at no cost to FMCP PPO members and eligible dependents ages 13+.
- **Stay Hydrated.** Water is integral to every cell in the human body, so it's vitally important to drink enough. Staying hydrated is essential year-round, and it can help you have optimal health even during the months where the weather has you down.
- **Get Your Daily Dose of Sunshine.** Understanding how to combat seasonal depression involves knowing about the power of natural sunlight. Get outside of the house regularly. When indoors, leave the window blinds open to let the sun in. If you work inside, try to find a location with natural light.
- **Take the Right Vitamins.** Vitamin D deficiency is linked to depression. Many people struggle with getting enough Vitamin D, particularly in the winter months. While sunshine is the best source of vitamin D, if you're unable to get enough natural bright light during the dark winter months, consider taking an organic, plant-based vitamin D supplement. The recommended form of vitamin D is called vitamin D3, or cholecalciferol — though some studies show that vitamin D2 can work just as well. Studies have shown that those who took vitamin D supplements saw a noticeable improvement in their depression symptoms. If you are considering taking vitamin D, be sure to speak with your health care provider before trying out a new supplement.
- **Try Light Therapy.** When those dark, gray days keep you from getting that natural sunlight you crave, bright light therapy might do the trick. Sometimes called Light in a Box, light therapy boxes emit very bright artificial light that mimics natural sunshine. They can help synchronize your circadian rhythm and cause chemical changes in your brain to elevate your overall mood. Sitting in front of a lightbox daily for about 30 minutes can help reduce the effects of SAD.
- **Stay Connected with Friends.** There's a definitive link between isolation and depression. That's why getting together with valued friends is an effective way to combat the effects of seasonal affective disorder. So consider finding some creative ways to meet up with your friends, especially during the cool autumn and cold winter months, even if it's just an online video chat.
- **Exercise Daily.** There's massive evidence that regular exercise can effectively combat depression symptoms. Combined with all the other numerous health benefits it offers, it's a no-brainer that working out during the cold, dark months of the year can be beneficial in helping with SAD. Semi-strenuous exercise, to the point of perspiration, releases endorphins, stimulates immunity, aids digestion, and offers several other physiological responses that help to prevent and alleviate depression.
- **Plan Your Meals.** Some people with winter seasonal affective disorder experience tiredness, excessive sleeping, changes in appetite, and overeating (especially high-carb foods). Take some time to plan healthy meals and prepare them at home. If you have any concerns about your changes in appetite, speak with your therapist about what is going on so that you can address this.
- **Consider Medication.** SAD is a type of depression — it's a mental health condition. This means it must be diagnosed by a licensed health care provider. Ask your current provider about getting screened for SAD. They can either provide a diagnosis or refer you to a convenient, online mental health provider. Antidepressant medications may work to combat SAD and should not necessarily be ruled out immediately. Some people, however, try alternative treatment options and other forms of therapy first. Your health care provider can help you determine which treatment is right for you.

You don't have to suffer in silence if you deal with seasonal affective disorder. You can learn how to cope. There are so many effective, helpful, easy tips you can use to learn to alleviate the depression and loneliness you might experience over the winter months.

To get started with therapy through Talkspace, log on to [www.talkspace.com/fmcp](http://www.talkspace.com/fmcp).



*Please note: This benefit only applies to members who have their medical benefits through one of the FMCP PPO Plans. If you are eligible, you must register through [www.talkspace.com/fmcp](http://www.talkspace.com/fmcp) to receive this benefit at no cost through the FMCP.*

Source: [Talkspace](https://www.talkspace.com)

#### WELLNESS TIP!

##### FEED YOUR GUT BACTERIA

The bacteria in your gut, called the gut microbiota, are incredibly important for overall health. A disruption in gut bacteria is linked to some chronic diseases, including obesity and multiple digestive problems.

Improve gut health by eating probiotic foods like yogurt and sauerkraut, taking probiotic supplements and eating plenty of fiber. Notably, fiber serves as a *prebiotic*, or a food source for your gut bacteria.

Sources: [Healthline](https://www.healthline.com)

#### REMINDER

##### OPT IN TO RECEIVE ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATIONS

You can now opt in to receive electronic communications from the FMCP through the Member Self-Service Online Portal! Opting in will notify you when you have a new document to review in your account, like an EOB, and will let us alert you to important Plan updates and announcements!

**To opt in, log in to your account in the portal, go to the Contact Us tab, and click the check box for Electronic Communications.**

### WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT CHOLESTEROL

Did you know that almost 2 in 5 American adults have high cholesterol? High cholesterol has no signs or symptoms, so many don't even know that they have it until they've had their cholesterol checked. With a problem this widespread, it's important to know the facts from the American Heart Association about high cholesterol and what it might mean for you.

#### What is Cholesterol?

Cholesterol is a waxy, fat-like substance. It's not inherently "bad." Your body needs it to build cells and make vitamins and other hormones, but too much cholesterol can pose a problem. Cholesterol comes from two sources. Your liver makes all the cholesterol you need. The remainder of the cholesterol in your body comes from foods from animals (like meat, poultry, and dairy products, for example).



Here's the brief:

- **HDL = GOOD:** High-density lipoprotein is known as "good" cholesterol.
- **LDL = BAD:** Low-density lipoprotein is known as "bad" cholesterol.
- **HDL:** Helps keep LDL from sticking to artery walls and reduces plaque buildup. This process can lower the risk of heart disease and stroke.
- **Triglycerides:** The most common type of fat in the body.
- **Total Cholesterol:** HDL level + LDL level + 1/5th of triglyceride level = total cholesterol level.

#### Why Cholesterol matters

Cholesterol circulates in the blood. As the amount of cholesterol in your blood increases, so does the risk to your health. High cholesterol contributes to a higher risk of cardiovascular diseases, such as heart disease and stroke. That's why it's important to have your cholesterol tested, so you can know your levels.

The two types of cholesterol are: LDL cholesterol, which is bad, and HDL, which is good. Too much of the bad kind, or not enough of the good kind, increases the risk that cholesterol will slowly build up in the inner walls of the arteries that feed the heart and brain.

Cholesterol can join with other substances to form a thick, hard deposit on the inside of the arteries. This can narrow the arteries and make them less flexible — a condition known as atherosclerosis. If a blood clot forms and blocks one of these narrowed arteries, a heart attack or stroke can result.

#### Know your risk

High cholesterol is one of the major controllable risk factors for coronary heart disease, heart attack and stroke. If you have other risk factors such as smoking, high blood pressure or diabetes, your risk increases even more.

The more risk factors you have and the more severe they are, the higher your overall risk.

#### How to Control Cholesterol

When it comes to cholesterol, remember: check, change and control. That is:

- **Check** your cholesterol levels. It's key to know your numbers and assess your risk.
- **Change** your diet and lifestyle to help improve your levels.
- **Control** your cholesterol, with help from your doctor if needed

You can learn more about cholesterol as well as risk factors and ways to help manage it in the HealthClips library.



To access the library, log in to your account in the Member Self-Service Online Portal at [www.nifcmcp.com](http://www.nifcmcp.com) and find the HealthClips tab in the left menu bar (just above the Contact Us tab). When you click on the HealthClips link, you'll be automatically logged in to view any of the multitudes of resources that HealthClips has to offer.

Source: [Heart.org](https://www.heart.org)

#### IMPORTANT CONTACT INFORMATION

PPO - Anthem 1-800-810-BLUE (Provider locator services) <a href="http://www.anthem.com">www.anthem.com</a>	Rx Drugs - SavRx 1-866-233-4239 <a href="http://www.savrx.com">www.savrx.com</a>	Teladoc Health 1-800-TELADOC <a href="http://www.teladoc.com">www.teladoc.com</a> (if applicable)	Dental - MetLife 1-800-942-0854 <a href="http://www.metlife.com/mybenefits">www.metlife.com/mybenefits</a> (if applicable)	Vision - VSP 1-800-877-7195 <a href="http://www.vsp.com">www.vsp.com</a> (if applicable)	NECA/IBEW Family Medical Care Plan 410 Chickamauga Avenue, Suite 301 Rossville, GA 30741 1-877-937-9602 <a href="http://www.nifcmcp.com">www.nifcmcp.com</a>
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