

# Seasonal Affective Disorder FACT SHEET



## What Is Seasonal Affective Disorder?

Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD), also called the winter blues, is a condition that causes a significant mood change when the seasons change. SAD is a type of **depression**. Most cases of SAD start in late fall or early winter and go away during the spring or summer. Less commonly, SAD can also occur during the spring and summer months.

## Signs and Symptoms

Signs and symptoms of SAD include those commonly associated with major depression. For winter-pattern SAD, additional symptoms may include:

- Oversleeping
- Overeating, particularly with a craving for carbohydrates
- Weight gain
- Social withdrawal

## Ways To Reduce Impact

There are several ways to reduce the impact of seasonal mood changes on residents in nursing facilities.

- **Education:** Provide staff, residents and their families with adequate education and resources about SAD and how it manifests.
- **Environmental adjustments:** Place comfortable chairs near large windows that provide natural light. Open blinds and curtains to increase sunlight.
- **Group activities:** Conduct group activities in rooms with large amounts of natural light. Hold activities on an outdoor patio or courtyard when the weather permits.
- **Monitor:** Routinely monitor residents for depression once a month, starting in November and more frequently for residents with a known history of SAD. The Patient Health Questionnaire 2/9 are effective screening tools for identifying symptoms of depression.
- **Referral:** If there are signs and symptoms of significant depression, refer the resident to a qualified health care provider for a more thorough assessment and diagnosis.

## Treatment Options

Options available to treat SAD include:



- **Light Therapy:** Increase exposure to sunlight or use a light box that provides at least 10,000 lux exposure. Light box usage is individualized and can be used for approximately 30 minutes daily. Residents with certain eye diseases or are taking medications that increase sensitivity to sunlight may need to use alternative treatments or light therapy under medical supervision.



- **Psychotherapy or Talk Therapy:** Therapy that teaches residents coping skills to manage symptoms can be beneficial.



- **Medication Management:** SAD is a form of depression. Antidepressant medications can be used to treat SAD. Consult the medical team to determine if these medications are appropriate for residents.



- **Vitamin D:** Many people with SAD often have a vitamin D deficiency. Supplements of vitamin D may help improve symptoms. Consult the medical team to determine if these supplements are appropriate for residents.

**All changes in a resident's mood should be reported to the clinical team.**

## References:

[Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration: Seasonal Affective Disorder](#)

[National Institute of Mental Health: Seasonal Affective Disorder](#)



Scan the QR code to view additional resources and trainings from the COE-NF.