

Tip sheet

Seasonal Affective Disorder

As the days get shorter and the temperatures drop, do you find thoughts of winter stir up feelings of sadness, negativity, or dread? For some of us the arrival of winter can bring on seasonal depression.



What is SAD?

Seasonal affective disorder (SAD) is a type of depression related to changes in the seasons. People who experience SAD often notice a drop in mood in autumn and continue to feel low through the winter months. However, SAD usually lifts during spring and summer.

Symptoms

It's common for our mood, energy levels, eating and sleeping habits to adapt to the seasons. But if these feelings are frequent and interfere with your life, it could be a sign of seasonal depression.

More symptoms include:

- feeling sad or having down days;
- loss of interest in activities;
- low energy and feel sluggish;
- not able to concentrate;
- overeating and craving comfort food;
- sleep disturbances;
- feeling hopeless, worthless, or guilty;
- having thoughts of not wanting to live.

Why does it happen?

As seasons change so do the natural rhythms of our bodies. These include:

Our internal body clock

This regulates our mood and appetite changes with the seasons. You may find you want to sleep more and eat hearty food in winter.

Serotonin levels

A brain chemical that can make you feel happy, calm, or less hungry – may drop in winter and lead to feelings of depression.

Melatonin levels

A brain chemical that regulates sleep patterns and mood) may fluctuate over winter which can affect your sleep and mood.

Self-help for SAD

If you are experiencing seasonal depression, here are some steps you can take to feel better:

- get outdoors as much as possible. As sun and fresh air boost vitamin D and serotonin levels in the body;
- exercise regularly because it increases serotonin and endorphins (another feel-good brain chemical) and lifts your mood;
- make sure you stay in contact with friends and family, so you don't feel isolated;
- get into healthy eating and drinking habits. Balanced meals and low levels of alcohol minimise mood swings and maintain energy levels;
- reduce your stress levels. Ask for help if you're not sure how to reduce stress.

Contact Vitae for support

Your workplace offers support from Vitae's Employee Assistance Program (EAP). You can speak to a Vitae counsellor at any time or make a scheduled appointment by calling **0508 664 981**.



Contact

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