



# THE EAP CONNECTION

## Dealing with Seasonal Affective Disorder During the Holidays

It's the holiday season, the so-called most magical time of year... but it might not feel that way for you if you are one of the millions of U.S. adults experiencing Seasonal Affective Disorder, also known as SAD. With colder temperatures and less daylight hours, people are more at risk of developing winter blues. SAD is a type of depression that typically occurs during fall and winter months (although it can happen year-round), in which cold weather and lack of sunlight seem to be triggering factors.

Common symptoms of SAD include:

- Losing interest or pleasure in things you once enjoyed
- Feeling fatigued or sluggish
- Having issues with concentration
- Oversleeping or trouble sleeping
- Experiencing changes in appetite or weight
- Withdrawing socially
- Feeling restless, irritable, or agitated
- Having a sense of hopelessness or worthlessness

Fortunately, there are things that you can do to help lessen the effects of seasonal depression. Developing a mental wellness toolkit for yourself can help you feel better and more connected this winter.

**Be active:** Include physical activity in your schedule as often as possible. Exercise can boost your mood and has been shown to reduce and prevent depression. Trying out new or different types of movement (such as yoga, HIIT workouts, dance, or core programs) keeps things interesting and helps with motivation. Additionally, if you can get outside during the daytime, you'll benefit from the increased exposure to sunlight.

**Stay connected:** Social withdrawal and isolation are closely related to SAD. Participating in social activities and staying connected to others can help ease the symptoms of SAD. If going to a holiday party or other social gathering seems overwhelming, consider starting smaller with a phone call to a friend or dinner with a couple of close relatives.

**Engage in self-care:** Maintaining a daily routine, eating healthy foods, getting enough sleep, regularly exercising, and doing relaxing activities are great ways to take care of yourself and boost your mood. Remember, taking time for yourself isn't selfish, it's essential to your well-being. Everyone is unique when it comes to self-care, so explore what works best for you.

**Light therapy:** Any exposure to sunlight is helpful with SAD. If you can get some rays while you have morning coffee or go for a quick walk over the lunch hour, the sunshine may help you feel more alert and improve your mood. If getting natural sunlight is difficult, you may want to consider a light box, an artificial light source that mimics the effects of the sun, to help increase your exposure time. You could talk with a counselor or your doctor about the benefits and uses to determine if it's a good fit for you.

**Talk to a Professional:** If you are using the above strategies and continuing to struggle, it may be helpful to talk to a counselor or your doctor about additional strategies or coping methods that could be helpful. Reach out to your EAP at 1-800-222-8590 as a starting place to get connected.

Resource: National Institute of Mental Health. (n.d.). *Seasonal affective disorder*. Retrieved from <https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/publications/seasonal-affective-disorder>.