

Don't be S.A.D.: Tips to Break out of Your Winter Blues

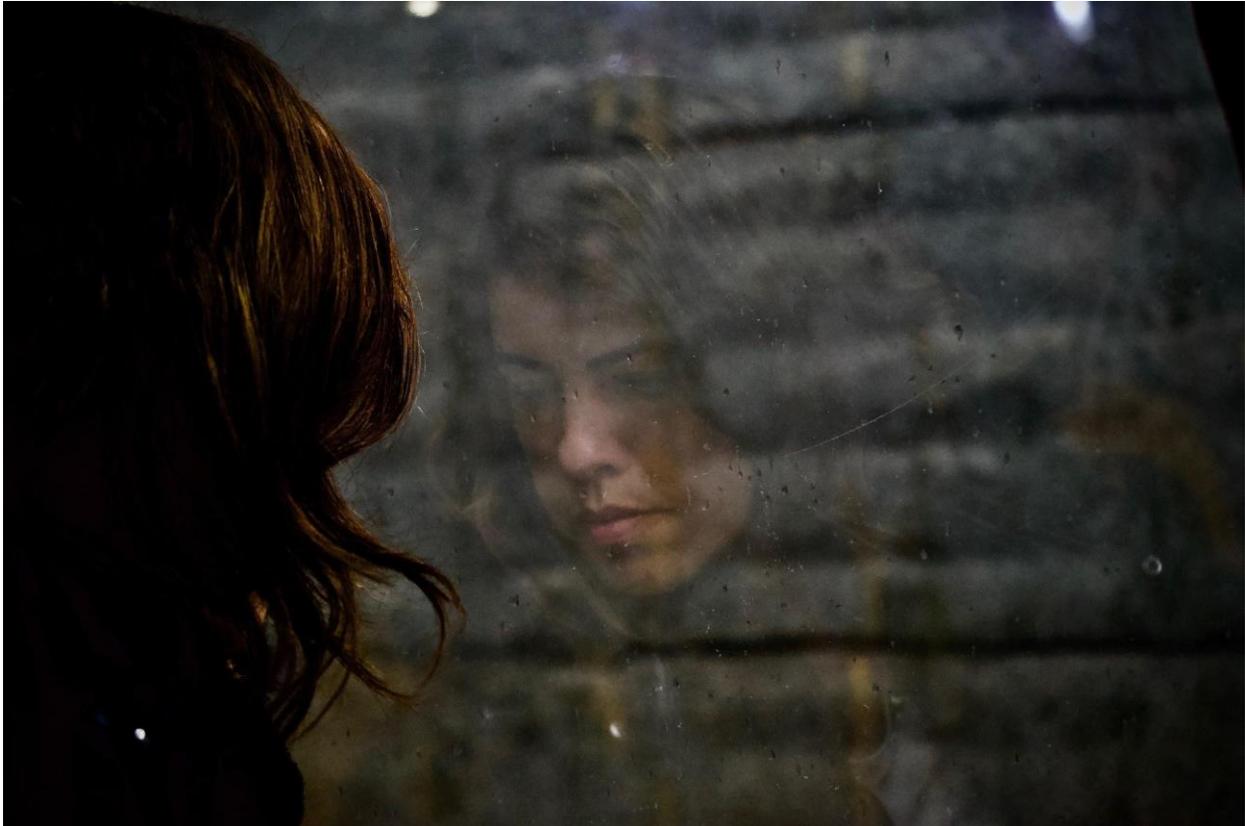


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Seasonal affective disorder, or S.A.D., is a temporary form of depression brought on by the changing of the seasons. While there are reported cases of [summer-based S.A.D.](#), the majority of seasonal depression sufferers experience symptoms in the winter. [Symptoms of S.A.D.](#) include loss of interest, mood swings, melancholy, fatigue, irritability, brain fog, relationship problems, heaviness in limbs, frequent oversleeping, and overeating followed by weight gain. S.A.D. is not a “lighter” form of depression; rather, it is a specific type of major depression where the patient’s symptoms go into remission with the next change of seasons.

Since it is the [same basic illness](#), treatment for S.A.D. is very similar to that of chronic depression. Those who believe they are experiencing depression should consult their doctors as soon as possible. They will recommend a treatment course that may include [talk therapy](#) and medication, depending on your symptoms and medical history. While you should always consult a physician if you experience symptoms of S.A.D., there are some healthy lifestyle changes you can try out to support your recovery and feel better sooner.

Self-Care to Help with S.A.D.

You don't need to go to a doctor to start practicing self-care for your [mental and physical wellness](#). "Self-care" is a term that encompasses all the actions you take to achieve optimal wellness. It can be the little things you do daily, such as getting enough sleep and brushing your teeth. It also describes the big things you do for your overall well-being-- things like traveling, going to therapy, and getting periodic massages for relaxation. Self-care of all forms is necessary.

But if you're feeling depressed-- especially if you're experiencing a [depressive episode](#)-- it's easy to let self-care fall to the wayside. In fact, depression causes dysfunction in your brain's [frontal lobes](#), the area responsible for executive functioning, problem-solving, judgment, and reasoning. If you're in the depths of depression, try doing one or more of the following self-care practices to feel a little better and support your recovery.

Take a Bath

Bathing is one of those things depressed people hate to be told to do. So instead of thinking of a bath as "maintenance" and "cleaning," consider it for its relaxing properties. [Baths](#) are therapeutic. The combination of bodily comfort, warmth, isolation, and body positioning can elevate your mood. They can help soothe sore muscles and skin irritation. Furthermore, a good bath can help certain elements of your immune system to function more efficiently.

Clean Something

Depression often feels like you're powerless to make any real change in the world. You feel out of control and aimless. Cleaning one thing-- *any* thing-- around your house helps in a couple of ways. First of all, it gives you a sense of control over something, as minuscule as it may be. You may not be able to change much in the world, but you *can* clean off those toothpaste splatters on your bathroom mirror. Beyond the sense of control, cleaning something is an achievable task. Achieving a goal, even a minor one, can give you a little boost of [dopamine](#), which can elevate your mood.

Meditate

If getting out of bed is out of the question-- let alone taking a bath or cleaning-- you can still [meditate](#). [Mindfulness meditation](#) helps those with depression by training your brain to break out of the ruminative thinking processes widely found to underlie a depressive episode. There is even some evidence suggesting meditation can [change certain brain regions](#) that are specifically linked with depression. Sit up, find a [guided meditation online](#), and spend 5 or 10 minutes focusing on yourself to help recover from your depressive episode.

Seasonal affective disorder is a type of depression; therefore, it needs to be treated as such. While only a doctor can help with medical treatment, there are things you can do to support your mental well-being. People experiencing depression may neglect self-care, but even a small action can help lift their mood. Try accomplishing a small goal-- such as taking a comforting bath, cleaning something in the home, or practicing meditation-- to feel better sooner.