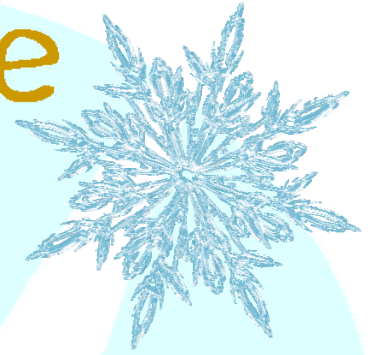


# What to do with the Wintertime Blues



**“Why art thou cast down, O my soul?”**

*Psalm 43:5*

■ by Debi Mitchell, MS, LMFT



Many recognize the Wintertime Blues' name as “Seasonal Affective Disorder,” or “SAD.” This Major Depressive Disorder recurs regularly, according to the seasons, usually correlating to the amount of sunshine and cold. The ability to function and number of depression symptoms identifies each individual's severity level.

Those with SAD suffer some specific symptoms: sleeping too much, eating too much, craving carbohydrates, and gaining weight. Many experience a desire to stay home and isolate.<sup>1</sup>

*“If I had more energy, I could have a life! All I want to do is sleep.”*

*“Why can't I just be a bear and hibernate for the winter?”*

*“I gain a ton of weight every winter and work hard to lose it every summer.”*

These familiar refrains echo through the lives of SAD sufferers. Seasonal Affective Disorder attacks our ability to live life as usual, but we can win those annual battles using these coping skills.

## What Can I Do to Feel Better?

We exist as three parts: body, soul, and spirit. We reduce symptoms, increase joy, and live a fuller life when we fight the battle with SAD from all sides.

### Body

- Buy a lamp specifically made to mimic sun's rays and use it regularly for at least 20-60 minutes every morning. Multiple levels of sunlamps are available at different costs. One client uses her lamp as her work's desk lamp, and she quickly noticed a difference!
- Exercise regularly. Exercise increases endorphins- our bodies “pleasure chemicals.” Be sure to plan and use ways to maintain it during SAD times. Between the increased desire to sleep and poor weather, even habitual exercisers can drift from routines, especially when we exercise outdoors. Some gyms make monthly terms available. Try using an accountability and/or exercise partner- “A person standing alone can be attacked and defeated, but two can stand back-to-back and conquer. Three are even better, for a triple-braided cord is not easily broken” (Ecclesiastes 4:12, New Living Translation).
- Create menus with good nutrition in advance that won't bust the budget. Good nutrition provides vitamins necessary to maintain good attitudes. With the seasonal increased costs of fresh vegetables & fruit, in addition to decreased energy for cooking, winter can become fast-food time.
- Consider asking your doctor for blood tests checking certain vitamin levels, like Vitamin D. Many physicians encourage the use of a Vitamin D supplement during winter months, especially in the Midwest. Be sure to talk to your doctor; Vitamin D levels need to be monitored by a physician.

- Continued on Page 2 -

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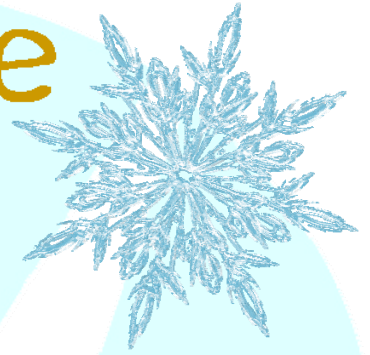
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- Continued from Page 1 -

- If necessary, consider talking to a physician or psychiatrist about taking an antidepressant. Many SAD sufferers take antidepressants seasonally -- generally beginning approximately 1 month prior to the normal seasonal start as antidepressants generally take 2-4 weeks before we feel the benefits.

## Soul

- Practice mindfulness. Books, articles, classes, apps and more exist to teach and help us practice living in the present, while balancing the negatives with the positives.
- Practice challenging negative thoughts. Skewed or twisted thoughts exist for us all, and our thoughts impact our emotions. Romans 12:2 challenges us to be "transformed through the renewing of our minds," meaning we change as we change our thinking to match God's.
- Consider Christian counseling. An objective professional helps to recognize patterns & thoughts becoming skewed. Proverbs 11:14 states: "Where there is no guidance, a people falls, but in an abundance of counselors there is safety" (NKJV).

## Spirit

- Keep a "Blessings" or "Thankfulness" journal throughout the year. When we write what is good about our lives when we can see it more easily, we can read back and gain hope & happiness. We find peace when we think about "...whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things" (Philippians 4:8, ESV).
- Remember we fight a spiritual battle. SAD, like any depression, attempts to break our connections and isolate us, even from God. When we feast on the Bible, prayer, and worship, we increase our connection- our intimacy- with God and feel less alone.

SAD tries to win every year. We tire of fighting. But don't give up!  
When we trust in Christ, God's Spirit lives in us and gives us the power to really live. ■



***"I also pray that you will understand the incredible greatness of God's power for us who believe him. This is the same mighty power that raised Christ from the dead..."***  
*Ephesians 1:19-20, NLT*

*Debi Mitchell is a Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist and sees clients in our Schererville, IN location.*

### Citations:

National Institute of Mental Health; <https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/topics/seasonal-affective-disorder/index.shtml>; Seasonal Affective Disorder, last revised March, 2016.



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