

# Beating the Winter Blues

Statistics show credit card debt, chocolate and alcohol consumption, suicide, relationship counselling and even child abuse all reach a peak during the winter months.

In the natural world, winter involves birds nesting, bears hibernating and caterpillars curling into their cocoons, but humans tend to forget that less light and longer nights can have a huge impact on both our mood and our internal rhythms.

Though even the most severe winter in Australia can't compare with parts of North America, and Scandinavia, research shows that, on average, about one in 300 Australians experiences seasonal affective disorder (SAD) or seasonal depression or the winter blues.

SAD sufferers typically experience depressive symptoms during the winter months: fatigue, weight gain, sleep problems such as insomnia and hypersomnia, mood swings, introversion and food cravings. The problem many doctors have in diagnosing SAD is the symptoms overlap with many sleep disorders and other forms of depression.

## 10 Tips to Avoid Seasonal Depression

### 1. Keep active

Research has shown the positive impact of a daily one-hour walk preferably in the middle of the day.

### 2. Get outside

Go outdoors in natural daylight as much as possible. Inside your home, choose pale colours that reflect light from outside, and sit near windows whenever you can.

### 3. Keep warm

Being cold makes you more depressed. It's also been shown that staying warm can reduce the winter blues by half. Keep warm with hot drinks and hot food and aim to keep your home between 18C and 21C.

### 4. Eat healthily

A healthy diet will boost your mood, give you more energy and stop you putting on weight over winter. Balance your craving for carbohydrates, such as pasta and potatoes, with plenty of fresh fruit and vegetables.

### 5. Lighten up

Light therapy can be effective in up to 85% of diagnosed cases. This can be as simple as more sunlight or one way to get light therapy at home in winter is to sit in front of a light box for up to two hours a day.

### 6. Take up a new hobby

Keeping your mind active with a new interest seems to ward off symptoms of SAD - such as playing bridge, singing, knitting, joining a gym, keeping a journal or writing a blog. The important thing is that you have something to look forward to and concentrate on.

### 7. See your friends and family

Socialising is good for your mental health. Make an effort to keep in touch with people you care about and accept any invitations you get to social events, even if you only go for a little while.

### 8. Talk it through

Talking treatments such as counselling, psychotherapy or cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) can help you cope with symptoms. See your GP for information on what's available.

### 9. Join a support group

Think about joining a support group. Sharing your experience with others who know what it's like to have SAD is very therapeutic and can make your symptoms more bearable.

### 10. Seek help

If your symptoms are so bad that you can't live a normal life, see your GP for medical help.



FOR MEDICAL ASSISTANCE  
CALL YOUR LOCAL GP.

FOR MORE INFORMATION  
ABOUT BEATING THE WINTER  
BLUES CALL BEYOND BLUE  
ON 1300 22 4636.