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## Why do some people struggle with summer depression?

Seasonal affective disorder (SAD) affects most people in the winter, but for a minority can cause summer depression too. This means a time of year associated with health and happiness can instead be blighted by mood swings and anxiety.

### Living with summer depression

The warmer months can be a time of health and optimism, a chance to reconnect with the great outdoors after the dark, seemingly interminable, months of winter.

However, for a minority of those people with [seasonal affective disorder \(SAD\)](#), summer can be a miserable time. Around 10% of people with SAD experience it in reverse – as summer SAD.

Longer days, increased heat and humidity as well as [issues around body image](#) may be contributing factors to spring and summer depression, while symptoms of SAD are thought to include loss of appetite, disrupted sleep, [weight loss](#) and [anxiety](#).

### What is seasonal affective disorder? (SAD)

Most of us are affected by the change in seasons – it's not unusual to feel more cheerful and energetic when the sun is shining and the days are longer, or to find that you eat more or sleep longer in winter. But if you are affected by SAD, seasonal changes have a much bigger effect on mood and energy levels, and may lead to symptoms of depression that significantly impact day-to-day life.

"Most people experience winter SAD," explains Stephen Buckley, head of information at the mental health charity [Mind](#). "Less commonly, some people find they experience the SAD seasonal pattern in reverse, with this type of depression occurring in the summer months. SAD is most common in countries like the UK where there are large changes in the weather and daylight hours during the different seasons."

## Causes of summer depression

The causes of SAD, and especially the summer depression version of SAD, aren't always clear, reveals Buckley.

"It is important to say that the causes of SAD are unlikely to be purely physical and that we don't fully understand them," he stresses. "It's likely that other elements such as difficult life events, trauma and physical illness can also cause winter or summer depression and SAD, and the impact SAD disorder has on you will also be affected by your overall feelings and coping skills."

Summer can bring specific challenges that might affect people's mental health, Buckley reveals.

"Lots of people find [body image worries](#) are heightened in summer, especially for people who are unhappy with their weight, size or have scars from self-harming, for example. Also, longer daylight hours and shorter nights can cause disruption to our sleep patterns, and it might be harder to get the amount of sleep that some people need to keep well causing sufferers to feel sleepy during the day."

## Seasonal affective disorder symptoms

Circadian rhythm problems – disturbed nights as well as excessive tiredness during the day – are a common symptom of SAD, whether experienced as summer depression or winter. Others include [depression](#), decreased energy levels, [loss of libido](#), anxiety and irritability, and a [craving for carbohydrates](#) and sweet foods.

"Many of us experience a dip in our mood," says Buckley. "But if you experience SAD, you may find it difficult to stay in work and maintain relationships, and can lose all interest in the things in life you used to enjoy."

# How to get over summer depression

With a little planning there are myriad practical ways to take the fight to summer depression.

1. Plan ahead so you feel in control, both socially and professionally, and don't worry if you feel out of step with everyone else. After all, you're not obliged to be happy just because it is summer.
2. Be sure to exercise during cooler times of the day, and wind down with [relaxation techniques](#) such as [yoga](#), [meditation](#), deep breathing or muscle relaxation.
3. Create a [sleep action](#) plan. Blackout curtains, lighter blankets, an air conditioned room and practical gadgets such as fans and seasonal affective disorder lamps can help you recharge your batteries during the night.

## Seasonal affective disorder treatments

In addition to self-help, several treatments can help alleviate summer depression symptoms.

- Light therapy may be helpful for some people. This involves daily exposure to a very bright specialist light, usually for a couple of hours a day.
- Talking treatments, such as counselling, [psychotherapy](#) or [cognitive behavioural therapy](#), can be extremely useful in helping people to cope with symptoms.
- [Antidepressants](#) may also be prescribed for people with severe SAD, and can be combined with light therapy for maximum effect.

"If you're worried about your mental health, it's always a good idea to seek help – even if you're not sure if you are experiencing a specific mental health problem such as SAD or depression," Buckley concludes.

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