

WELLNESS CONNECTION

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HEALTHY HARMONY - Take a Proactive Approach this Winter to Combatting SAD



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By Joy Brownridge

It's that time of year again - time to prepare for winter. While some folks may enjoy thoughts of holidays and snow, others may instead experience a sense of dread as the winter months draw closer. As someone who experiences this feeling, I set out to discover how I can best prepare, prevent, and combat what is referred to as Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD). SAD is listed in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5) as a type of depression. It can have a true mental health diagnosis, so for this month's article, I spoke with DeAnn Winn, LPC, a Mental Health Therapist with [Champaign Counseling LLC](#) first.

If you feel depressed in the winter months, here are some suggestions where you can begin to feel better. You will first want to make sure there is no medical reason that you are feeling depressed. The first question to ask yourself is "*When is the last time I had a physical with complete bloodwork?*" A lack of vitamin D can lead to depression, and your doctor can order labs to check that your levels are within the ideal range. Other things your doctor may check include

iron levels (incorrect levels can contribute to fatigue) and the thyroid (thyroid issues can also contribute to depression).

Here are some more items to avoid, and some to implement this winter to set yourself up for success.

Don't:

- Get insufficient or disrupted sleep, as either one can lead to depression. To read more about sleep hygiene, check out [this article](#).
- Think or repeat negative internal messages. If you are always dreading winter and internally fixating on that dread, it will reinforce the bad feelings.
- Take supplements or anti-depressants on your own. Always consult a medical professional before beginning any kind of treatment for depression.

Do:

- Try to appreciate what you can about the season and think of things you enjoy about it. Heated blankets, warm socks, and hot cocoa are just a few examples of winter blessings.
- Find ways to stay connected with others. If we feel disconnected from other people, we may experience depression more easily. We can lose connection with others due to staying indoors and avoiding the cold, but consistent connection is helpful.
- Move every day, and in a way that works best for you. Try walking or yoga. Yin yoga is a less vigorous style of yoga that still provides endorphins and will give you the benefits of any other kind of exercise.
- Consider purchasing a sun lamp, as 20-30 minutes per day can be quite useful. Using these lamps allows your brain to perceive that you are getting sunlight and enables it to produce the same “happiness-inducing” effect.
- Try aromatherapy. Research any essential oils or scents first to make sure you use the correctly and to know if they could irritate your skin or pet.
- Take advantage of warmer days. Try to get outside as much as possible when the weather permits. The fresh air and sunlight will do wonders for your well-being.
- When you can't get outside, let natural light in as much as possible. If you can't do this at home, make regular visits to a coffee shop, library, or restaurant with great natural light.

We can all enjoy this upcoming cold season by taking a proactive approach to establishing healthy winter routines!

Sources:

Champaign Counseling link: <https://www.facebook.com/champaigncounseling>

Article link: <https://sleepeducation.org/healthy-sleep/healthy-sleep-habits/>

