



Mind: Holiday Blues
Body: SAD and Your Body
Spirit: Feel It and Let It Go

Overcoming Seasonal Blues



December's arrival usually ushers in a season sprinkled with sparkling lights, heartwarming melodies, and shared traditions. Yet, have you ever wondered why amidst these festive symbols, some of us find ourselves grappling with a shadow of loneliness or a touch of melancholy? This is particularly true for older adults who might find the holiday season a mixed bag of emotions. The Holiday Blues, as they are often termed, along with Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD), paint a different picture of this time of year. Let's delve into understanding these experiences and how we can foster a holiday season that's truly joyful for everyone.

Differentiating Holiday Blues and SAD:

You might have noticed that for some, the holidays bring fleeting feelings of sadness or anxiety. This could stem from the hustle of holiday preparations, the fatigue of expectations, or perhaps a longing for the past.

These are the Holiday Blues – transient yet impactful.

Contrastingly, SAD is a more profound mood shift, often aligning with the shorter, colder days of winter. It's more than just a case of the winter blues – it's a clinical condition that requires understanding and care, especially in places like Canada where the winter days are short and sunlight scarce.

Recognizing the Signs:

How do we spot these blues in ourselves or others? It's in the small changes – maybe a decrease in enthusiasm for usual activities, a change in sleep patterns, or a certain irritability. It's crucial to recognize these signs early and to understand that it's okay to seek help when the holiday cheer doesn't feel as cheerful.

Tips for Managing Holiday Blues and SAD:

Celebrating Diversity: The holiday season is diverse and rich with different cultural and faith-based traditions. Let's embrace this variety in our celebrations.

Connecting and Caring: Loneliness can be a significant factor for many during this time. Regular communication, whether through calls, digital means, or volunteering, can be a lifeline.

Activity and Engagement: I suspect that we all know the power of physical activity in lifting our spirits. Simple indoor exercises or regular walks, coupled with mindfulness practices, can make a substantial difference.

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Diet and Wellness: What we eat impacts how we feel. Including nutritious, seasonal foods in our diet can be a step towards better mental health. While the holiday season typically presents wonderful trays of treats, it is important that we do not fall too far off our healthy eating wagon.

Light and Environment: For those suffering from SAD, light therapy might be helpful. Also, creating a bright and cheerful living space can uplift the mood. My husband and I had the privilege of visiting two Inuit villages in Greenland. We were struck by the bright and cheerfully painted houses. We were told that this was intentional, to help alleviate the dreariness of winter months of darkness.

Seeking Professional Help: Remember, it's a strength to seek help. In Canada, organizations like the Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA) and The Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH) offer invaluable resources.

Conclusion:

As we navigate this holiday season, let's hold space for the entire spectrum of emotions that accompany it. It's more than okay not to feel constantly merry. In reaching out, whether for ourselves or others, we embrace the true spirit of the holidays – one of compassion, understanding, and community connection. Let's make this holiday season one where everyone feels seen, heard, and cherished.

Rhonda Latreille, MBA, CPCA
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Body: SAD and Your Body

The physiological basis of Seasonal Affective Disorder lies in the interplay between light, brain chemistry,

and circadian rhythms. Reduced sunlight in winter can disrupt your body's internal clock, leading to feelings of depression. This lack of light can also cause a drop in serotonin, a neurotransmitter that affects mood, and an imbalance in melatonin, which plays a role in sleep patterns and mood. These biochemical changes can trigger symptoms such as fatigue, depression, and a craving for carbohydrates.

Light therapy, also known as phototherapy, is a common and effective treatment for SAD. It involves exposure to bright artificial light, much brighter than normal indoor lighting but significantly less intense than direct sunlight. This light typically comes from a light box, which emits light that mimics natural outdoor light. By sitting near a light box for about 20-30 minutes each morning, preferably within the first hour of waking up, individuals with SAD can help alleviate their symptoms within a few days to two weeks and has few side effects. It's a non-invasive and increasingly popular way to combat the effects of SAD, bringing a semblance of the brighter days of spring and summer into the darker winter months.



Spirit:

"It's okay to feel your feelings. It's healthy to let them come, and let them go."

Judy Ford, Therapist