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Winter Blues or Something More?

When the days get shorter and colder, it's pretty normal to feel a little down. After the holidays, many of us feel tired, sluggish, or just "off" during those long, dark winter months. I'll admit—I've caught myself daydreaming about a sunny beach in Hawaii more than once!

But sometimes, it's more than just the winter blues. For some people, these feelings can be a sign of **Seasonal Affective Disorder**, or **SAD**. SAD is a type of depression that shows up during certain times of the year, most often in fall and winter. It's not just a mild case of the blahs; it's considered a major depressive disorder.

- **Who Does It Affect?**

You might be surprised to learn that millions of Americans experience SAD, and many don't even realize it. It's most common in young adults (ages 18–30), and women are affected more often than men. People with a history of depression or bipolar disorder are at higher risk, and it can even run in families.

- **What Are the Signs?**

SAD looks different for everyone, but here are some common symptoms to watch for:

- Feeling sad or anxious most days for at least two weeks
- Hopelessness or pessimism
- Irritability or restlessness
- Losing interest in things you usually enjoy
- Low energy or fatigue
- Trouble concentrating or making decisions
- Changes in sleep or appetite
- Oversleeping or craving carbs
- Social withdrawal
- Thoughts of death or suicide

- **Why Does It Happen?**

Researchers aren't completely sure, but one theory is that less sunlight in winter affects serotonin—a brain chemical that helps regulate mood. Low Vitamin D levels might make things worse since Vitamin D supports serotonin activity.

- **What Can Help?**

The good news is, SAD is treatable. Options include:

- **Light therapy** (special lamps that mimic sunlight)
- **Antidepressant medication**
- **Counseling or therapy**
- **Vitamin D supplements**

If you think you might have SAD, talk to your doctor or a mental health professional. And if you or someone you know is having thoughts of suicide, call or text **988** for the Suicide and Crisis Lifeline.

Want to learn more? Check out resources from the National Institute of Mental Health at <https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/publications/seasonal-affective-disorder>.