

# *Autism and beating the winter blues*



Seasonal Affective Disorder (also known as SAD, or ‘the winter blues’) can take a heavy toll on our mental health during the colder, darker months. For people with autism, in particular, it can be especially difficult to manage.

While no studies have been carried out to connect autism and SAD, many people believe there may be a link between the two. Either way, it’s helpful to know how to spot and manage Seasonal Affective Disorder so that you can enjoy what should be a fun and festive time of year. Keep reading for our tips on beating the winter blues for autistic people.

## **What is Seasonal Affective Disorder and what are the symptoms?**

Seasonal Affective Disorder is a form of depression related to a change in season. Typically, people present symptoms of SAD during the darker winter months and get better during the summer, but it can also be the other way around.

Common symptoms of Seasonal Affective Disorder include:

- Persistent low mood
- Losing interest in things you enjoyed
- Irritability
- Feeling hopeless, guilty, or worthless
- Lacking energy and sleeping lots more than usual
- Finding it difficult to get up in the morning
- Craving food (particularly carbohydrates) and gaining weight
- Social withdrawal
- Difficulty concentrating

## **Beating the winter blues as an autistic person**

Beating the winter blues can be tough, but there are ways to minimise symptoms so you can live each day as normally as possible. For people with autism, these tips can be particularly helpful:

### ***1. Exercise as regularly as possible***

Exercise has been proven time and time again to relieve stress and anxiety, so try to go for a walk or run daily if you can.

## ***2. Get outside and soak up some sunshine***

Though the exact cause of SAD is difficult to pinpoint, doctors believe lack of sunlight during winter is a contributing factor. The days may be short, but make sure to get your daily dose of vitamin D by going outside, or by keeping the curtains open.

## ***3. Try and take a holiday***

It may not be possible for everyone, but if you have the option to go away somewhere closer to the equator, do it. Even just a few days in the sun could really help.

## ***4. Be around people***

Social withdrawal is a symptom of SAD, but don't let it win. Making an effort to be around the people you love and care about will almost certainly boost your mood.



## ***5. Try light therapy***

Also called phototherapy, light therapy involves sitting in front of a light therapy box to 'trick' your brain into working the same way it does in summer. Make sure to speak to a doctor about this first to get their thoughts on whether it will work for you.

## ***6. Speak to your doctor about antidepressants***

If things get really bad, and our other tips aren't helping, it's a good idea to speak to your doctor - they may recommend that you consider taking antidepressants. These can take several weeks to take effect, but they can help in some cases.

