

Brighten Your Winter: Navigating the winter blues



Understanding Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD)



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As autumn and winter roll in, the days get shorter, and this can sometimes impact our mood and energy.

If your employees are feeling low, tired, or unmotivated, they might be experiencing Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD), often called the "winter blues." This type of depression follows a seasonal pattern and tends to hit harder during the colder months.

Shed some light: What brings on SAD?

According to the NHS. While the exact cause isn't fully understood, it's often linked to less sunlight. This can affect how the brain works, specifically the part called the hypothalamus. Here's how it might impact you and your team:

- Production of Melatonin – the body might produce more of the sleep hormone, melatonin, meaning they're more tired than usual.
- Production of Serotonin – serotonin is a hormone that affects mood, appetite, and sleep; a drop in serotonin can happen with less sunlight.
- The body's internal clock (circadian rhythm) – the body uses sunlight to time various important functions, such as waking up, less light can throw off the internal clock, affect daily rhythm.¹

Spotting the Signs to be able to support your team:

- Feeling persistently low or losing interest in everyday activities
- Irritability or feelings of despair
- Low energy and sleepiness during the day
- Craving carbs and potential weight gain
- Trouble concentrating or decreased interest in intimacy

For some people, these symptoms can be severe and have a significant impact on their day-to-day activities.

¹ [NHS SAD](#)

Simple tips to boost your team's wellbeing this winter:

1. **Get Sunlight:** Encourage stepping outside during daylight, especially around midday. Even brief exposure can lift spirits.
2. **Stay Active:** Exercise regularly to boost energy and reduce stress. A short lunchtime walk can make a big difference.
3. **Eat Well:** Though warm comfort foods are tempting, aim for balanced meals with complex carbs, fibre, veggies, and proteins to maintain energy and mood.
4. **Sleep Well:** With longer nights, it's easy to slip into oversleeping or feeling more lethargic. Sticking to a routine with 7 - 9 hours of sleep to keep energy steady.
5. **Stay Connected:** Social interactions are vital for mental health. Encourage maintaining connections with friends and family or organise a work social event.
6. **Seek Support:** Ensure your team knows where to find help, whether that's through managers or HR. If low mood persists, suggest consulting a doctor.

As the winter months set in, it's vital to acknowledge and address the mental health challenges that may arise. By being aware of the impact shorter days can have on our mood and energy, we can take proactive steps to support ourselves and those around us.

Remember, it's okay to focus on mental health. These feelings are temporary, and support is available. Encourage your team to prioritise their wellbeing this season.

For support, employees can reach out to these organisations:

[NHS Mental Health Services](#)

[Hub of Hope](#)

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