

Tips To Reduce SAD This Winter



Seasonal Affective Disorder—or SAD—is a type of depression typically found in northern climates and affects approximately half a million Americans each year with three out of four being women. The season for SAD is September to April with the worst period being December through February.

SAD symptoms vary from person to person. They can be mild, increase in severity during the peak months and can ease up once the sun starts to emerge. People who experience SAD can have decreased energy, trouble sleeping, loss of interest in activities, trouble concentrating, depressed feelings, social withdrawal, decreased sex drive and appetite, or weight-gain changes.

Here are ways to reduce SAD this winter:

Use a light box. A light box is used to compensate for the lack of natural sunlight during winter months. It is a form of artificial light that filters out ultraviolet rays but mimics natural daylight. Experts recommend using a light box each morning for 20 to 60 minutes.

Stay active. Exercise can help decrease symptoms that arise from SAD and can also help decrease or stabilize weight gain associated with irregular eating.

Take a vitamin D supplement. Vitamin D is considered the “sunshine vitamin” as it is produced in the body when the skin is exposed to sunlight. It has been shown

that vitamin D can improve mood and decrease the risk of SAD and depression in general.

Take a deep breath of fresh air. Stepping outside as often as possible while the sun is shining can also be beneficial for your body. Nature has an unmatched power to nurture.

Eat a well-balanced diet. A healthy, balanced diet with ample fruits and vegetables and few highly processed foods plays a role in reducing symptoms of depression, too.

Reach out for help. Talking to your health care provider can be helpful. Your physician will recognize common symptoms of SAD or

another form of depression and can help make recommendations for treatment; if one does have SAD, therapy may be recommended.

Harness your mind-body connection. Practice being in the present moment rather than focusing on the past or future. Be OK with saying no and be present with others; this will help you strengthen relationships and let go of the negative history or stressors. Try to prevent or relieve a buildup of stress. This can be done by practicing relaxation techniques, partaking in activities you enjoy, and figuring out your stressors and then trying to minimize them.

HOW MUCH CAFFEINE IS TOO MUCH?

As daylight hours wane and nudge us into a hibernation-like mode, it can be particularly challenging to bounce out of bed in the morning – even without Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD), a type of depression linked with decreased sunlight exposure during winter months. It might feel like a natural remedy to increase caffeine intake to increase perkiness. Caffeine does have health benefits (like slowing cognitive decline) but there is a limit on how much our bodies can handle without causing scary side effects. How can we use it wisely to both help our bodies and protect them?

QUICK FACTS

Up to 400 milligrams of caffeine per day (roughly four 8-ounce cups of coffee) is considered safe and can be part of a healthy diet for the average adult; 600 milligrams per day is too much. However, some coffee shops brew java containing much more caffeine per 8-ounce serving than home-brewed varieties.

One cup of brewed coffee has no fat and only a few calories. Plain coffee is nutritious – it contains micronutrients, such as potassium, magnesium and niacin.

Caffeine stays in the body for a long time; we can't 'flush it out,' either. The average half-life of caffeine is five hours, but it can take up to nearly 10 hours for the caffeine to leave your system. Try your best to avoid consuming caffeine after 2 p.m. to allow your body to metabolize at least half of the caffeine you consumed.

Caffeine is a central nervous-system stimulant. Regardless of your personal tolerance, consuming too much caffeine could make you feel nervous, anxious, irritable and jittery and could cause an irregular heart rhythm.

Decaf varieties still contain some caffeine. Caffeine is also in chocolate, energy bars and drinks and even some peanut butters, yogurts, jellybeans and mints!

Some medications and supplements may interact with caffeine:

- Ephedrine (used in decongestants): Might increase the risk of high blood pressure, heart attack, stroke or seizure when mixed with caffeine
- Theophylline (used to open bronchial airways): Might increase the adverse effects of caffeine, like nausea and heart palpitations, when mixed with caffeine
- Echinacea (herbal supplement used to prevent colds or infections): May increase the concentration of caffeine in your blood and may increase caffeine's side effects

Be sure to talk with your primary care physician or pharmacist about whether caffeine might affect your medications.



*Caffeine: How Much Is Too Much?," mayoclinic.org, accessed on Nov. 8, 2021.
*Are You Getting Too Much Caffeine?," Julia Calderone, consumerreports.org, Sept. 11, 2016.



Baked Pumpkin Pie Oatmeal

Prep Time: 5 minutes • Total Time: 40 minutes • Serves: 6

- 1 cup pumpkin purée
- 2 cups milk
- ¼ cup maple syrup
- 1 egg
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract
- 1 tablespoon butter, melted
- 2 cups rolled or old-fashioned oats
- 1 teaspoon baking powder
- 2 teaspoons pumpkin spice
- ½ teaspoon salt
- ¼ cup pecans, chopped

Recipe adapted from kaynutrition.com

1. Preheat the oven to 375 F and coat a 9 × 9-inch baking dish with nonstick cooking spray.

2. In a large bowl, combine the pumpkin purée, milk, maple syrup, egg, vanilla and butter. Whisk until it's well-combined.

3. Add to the bowl the oats, baking powder, pumpkin spice, salt and half of the pecans. Stir the mixture until well-combined.

4. Pour the mixture into the baking pan and top it with the remaining pecans.

5. Bake it for 35 to 40 minutes until the oatmeal is cooked thoroughly and the top is golden brown.

Notes: This recipe can be stored in a sealed container in the refrigerator for up to five days or frozen for up to three months.

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