



Fall 2026

Winter blues or seasonal affective disorder?

Shorter days, colder weather and less time outdoors can affect your mood, energy and motivation. You may feel more tired, crave comfort foods, want to sleep more, or be tempted to stay home and hibernate.

For many people, these feelings are a temporary case of the “winter blues.” But when changes in mood are more persistent or begin to interfere with everyday life, they could be a sign of seasonal affective disorder (SAD), a form of depression that follows a seasonal pattern.

Winter blues or something more?

The winter blues may leave you feeling a little less energetic or motivated than usual, but you can generally continue with your normal activities. SAD is more serious. Symptoms typically begin during the fall or winter and improve during the spring or

summer. Because SAD is a form of depression, symptoms can affect how you feel, think and function in your daily life.

Signs of SAD may include:

- Feeling sad, depressed or hopeless much of the day
- Losing interest in activities you normally enjoy
- Having low energy or feeling unusually tired
- Sleeping more than usual or having difficulty getting out of bed
- Craving carbohydrates or experiencing changes in appetite or weight
- Having difficulty concentrating
- Withdrawing from friends, family or activities

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Help brighten your winter

Whether you’re experiencing an occasional winter slump or simply want to support your emotional well-being, a few healthy habits may help:

- **Get natural light.** Open the blinds, sit near a sunny window or spend time outside during daylight hours.
- **Stay active.** Regular physical activity can improve mood, reduce stress and boost energy.
- **Keep connected.** Make plans with friends or family and stay in touch with people who make you feel supported.
- **Eat well.** A balanced diet that includes fruits and vegetables can help support your energy.
- **Find things to enjoy about the season.** A warm drink, a cozy evening, time with a pet or a favorite winter activity can give you something to look forward to.

SAD can be treated

A health care professional can help determine whether your symptoms are related to SAD or another condition and recommend appropriate treatment.

Treatment may include psychotherapy, medication or a combination of approaches. Light therapy, which involves regular exposure to a specially designed bright light, may also be recommended.

Talk with your primary care doctor or behavioral health specialist if changes in your mood are persistent or interfering with daily life. Seek immediate help if you are having thoughts of death, suicide or self-harm.



Can AI be your therapist?

Artificial intelligence (AI) chatbots can answer questions, offer suggestions and provide information within seconds. That convenience may make it tempting to turn to AI when you’re feeling stressed, anxious, overwhelmed or simply need someone to “talk” to.

While AI can be a useful resource, a chatbot isn’t a therapist and shouldn’t take the place of professional mental health care.

What AI may be missing

Therapy involves much more than responding to the words someone says. A trained mental health professional considers the whole person, including experiences, relationships, environment and other factors that may affect emotional well-being.

There are important things an AI chatbot may not be able to do reliably:

- **Pick up on nonverbal cues.** A therapist can notice changes in your facial expressions, body language, tone of voice and demeanor. Those signals may reveal something important that isn’t communicated through words alone.
- **Understand your full circumstances.** Culture, family relationships, financial concerns, housing, access to health care and other life experiences can influence mental health. AI may not fully recognize these nuances and can also produce responses influenced by biases or incomplete information.
- **Recognize when someone is in danger.** When a person is considering harming themselves or someone else, a trained professional can assess the situation and help connect that person with appropriate care. An AI chatbot may fail to recognize the seriousness of what someone is saying or respond appropriately.
- **Provide genuine human connection.** AI can produce responses that sound caring and supportive, but it doesn’t experience

empathy or build a therapeutic relationship. Trust and human connection are important parts of effective mental health care.

- **Know when not to agree with you.** Chatbots can sometimes reinforce a user’s assumptions or feelings rather than challenge unhealthy thinking. That can be particularly concerning when someone is experiencing a serious mental health issue.

Where AI can be helpful

AI doesn’t have to be an all-or-nothing proposition. Used appropriately, it can complement professional care.

For example, AI may help you learn about mental health topics or prepare questions to discuss with your doctor or therapist. It can explain general concepts, suggest ways to track your mood or stress, or help you identify resources to explore.

The key is to think of AI as a tool for information and support. It is not meant to diagnosis, treat or replace health care professionals.

Know when to reach out

Don’t rely on a chatbot if changes in your mental health are persistent, worsening or affecting your ability to function in everyday life. Signs that it’s time to seek professional help may include:

- Excessive worry, fear or feelings of hopelessness
- Notable changes in mood
- Loss of interest in activities you usually enjoy
- Persistent negative thoughts
- Significant changes in sleep or eating habits
- Difficulty managing everyday responsibilities
- Thoughts of harming yourself or someone else

If you’re struggling with your mental health, connect with a qualified health care professional for support. If you or someone else is in immediate danger, seek emergency help right away.

Don’t let winter put your workout on ice

Cold temperatures, snow, ice and fewer daylight hours can make it harder to stick with an outdoor exercise routine. But moving your workout indoors can help you stay active all winter. Whether you prefer the gym or your living room, there are plenty of ways to keep moving.

Find an indoor activity that works for you

You don’t need a complicated routine or expensive equipment to get a good workout.

Consider these options:

- **Walk it out.** Head to a mall, community center or indoor track, or walk on a treadmill. Walking is an easy way to keep moving when sidewalks and roads are snowy or icy.
- **Get your heart pumping.** Stationary bikes, treadmills, rowing machines and ellipticals can provide a cardiovascular workout without having to brave the elements.
- **Build strength.** Try light weights, resistance bands or body-weight exercises such as squats, wall push-ups and modified lunges. Strength training can help maintain muscle and support everyday activities.
- **Work on balance and flexibility.** Yoga, Pilates and stretching can improve flexibility, mobility and balance.
- **Try a class or indoor sport.** Dance, cycling, swimming, pickleball, basketball and other group activities can add variety and make exercise more social.
- **Create an at-home circuit.** Combine a few simple activities, such as marching in place, squats, wall push-ups and resistance-band exercises. Rotate through them at a pace that’s comfortable for you.

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Use winter to mix things up

If you usually walk, run or bike outside, consider winter an opportunity to work on different aspects of fitness. Adding strength, balance and flexibility exercises now can complement your favorite activities when warmer weather returns.

Trying something new can also help prevent boredom. Explore a new class, use a piece of exercise equipment you've never tried, or ask a friend or family member to join you. Finding activities you enjoy can make it easier to keep moving consistently.

And remember, short periods of activity throughout the day can add up. The goal is to find safe, realistic ways to make movement part of your routine even when the weather outside is not cooperating.

Talk with your primary care doctor before starting a new exercise routine, particularly if you have health concerns or have been inactive.

Resources to remember

Concierge Team

Call 866.434.1369

Available Monday-Friday, 7:30 a.m.-5:30 p.m., to help you find a provider or schedule an appointment.

Henry Ford MyCare Advice Line

Call 833.262.1949

Staffed by nurses and supported by a physician on-call 24/7 for adult and pediatric medical advice, you have access to immediate guidance for unexpected health concerns at no cost.

HenryFord.com/MyChart

The Henry Ford MyChart online tool gives you access to your medical records, test results, a way to communicate with your provider and schedule/conduct virtual visits.

HAP.org/Find-A-Doctor

Check online to see if your provider is in-network (Tier 1) by visiting HAP.org/Find-A-Doctor.

HenryFord.com/YourHealthCarePlan

Learn more about the HFHS Advantage Tiered Access and CDHP Comprehensive HFHS Preferred Network plans.