



5 SURPRISING FOODS THAT WILL ZAP SEASONAL DEPRESSION

If you're among the 5 percent of people who are affected by seasonal depression, you know how difficult it can be to beat. Taking a shower, exercising, or motivating yourself to do just about anything feels like a chore.

The good news is seasonal depression is treatable with medication or lifestyle changes (or both). Part of those lifestyle changes includes choosing foods that have been shown to ease seasonal depression.

What is seasonal depression?

Also known as seasonal affective disorder (SAD), seasonal depression is triggered by the change of seasons. It usually starts in late fall and lasts until spring when sunny days start outnumbering grey and gloomy ones.

Not to be confused with “the winter blues,” seasonal depression is a more serious condition. It’s identified in the *Diagnostic Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5)* as major depressive disorder with seasonal pattern.

People with seasonal depression don’t just feel down during the winter months; they experience extreme fatigue, sadness, and irritability. Many people with SAD have trouble concentrating and tend to oversleep. Some may even have thoughts of death or suicide.



Who does seasonal depression affect?

Millions of Americans experience seasonal depression, but many aren’t aware they have it.

A family history of mental illness or other forms of depression may put you at an increased risk of developing SAD, as can gender and age. Women are more often diagnosed with it, and most of the time it begins in young adulthood.

Where you live can also put you at risk. Living farther north, where there are fewer hours of daylight during the winter months, makes you more likely to develop seasonal depression.

Although the exact cause of SAD hasn’t been found yet, researchers believe a lack of sunlight creates a shift in your biological clock to which your body can’t adjust. The brain chemical serotonin, which contributes to feelings of happiness, is partially regulated by sunlight.

If you're at risk of seasonal depression, your serotonin activity may already be low. That means when the sun is tucked away behind a thick layer of clouds in the winter, your serotonin levels drop even further.

The lack of sunlight can also cause your body to produce higher amounts of melatonin, which is a brain chemical that affects your mood and sleep patterns.

Foods for seasonal depression

For some people, taking an antidepressant is the best option. For others, naturopathic treatments work well. These might include light therapy or cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT).

Though SAD is treatable, some of its symptoms can still linger. If that's the case for you, you'll want to find ways to ease those symptoms to get you through to the spring.

One way is to eat foods that have been shown to improve the symptoms of seasonal depression. Here are five:

Bananas

A lack of vitamin B6 can make feelings of sadness worse, so stock up on bananas during the winter months. Bananas are also a good source of tryptophan, which the body converts into serotonin.

Omega-3 Fatty Acids

Found in salmon, walnuts, and flaxseed, omega-3 fatty acids play an important role in brain function. A diet rich in omega-3s can improve your mood and ward off depression.

Whole Grains

Decreased levels of serotonin can cause you to crave foods containing carbohydrates. Stay away from simple carbs like chips and foods with highly processed white flour. Instead, choose whole grains like oats and quinoa. These foods contain complex carbohydrates that help boost levels of serotonin in the brain.



Dark Chocolate

Yes, you read that right: Dark chocolate can help your seasonal depression! Dark chocolate contains high levels of antioxidants and flavonoids, which have been linked to improved mood and decreased stress levels. Indulge in a square or two...just don't overdo it!

Spinach

Spinach is loaded with vitamins and minerals like folate, magnesium, and iron. Folate deficiency has been linked to depression. The next time you're at the grocery store, pick up some nutrient-rich spinach and add it to soups, stews, and casseroles.

Ease Your Seasonal Depression

It's normal to have days during the winter when you feel down, but if you feel down for days at a time and you can't get motivated to do activities you normally enjoy, schedule a visit to your health care provider.

If you're one of the estimated 10 million Americans who have seasonal depression, medicine and behavior therapy are good forms of treatment. And to ease your symptoms, give these five foods a try. Not only will they fuel your body with nutrients, they're good for your mental health, too.

