

# AU InforMed

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## Key Inforbits

- Seasonal Affective Disorder
- Managing Stress during the Holidays
- New Year's Resolutions and Setting Effective Goals



## SURVIVING THE WINTER

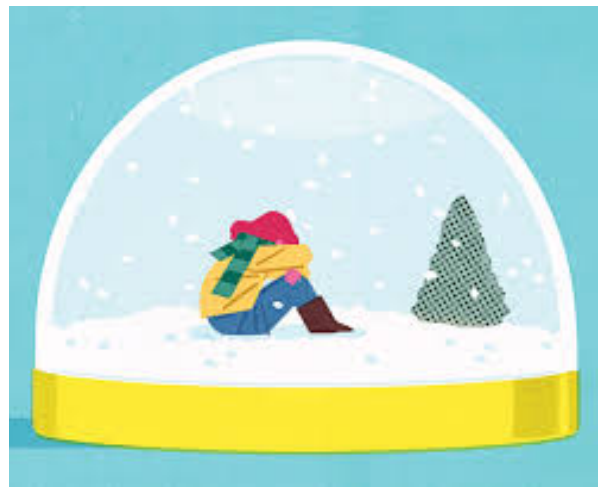
Strategies for Successfully Navigating the Holiday Season



## Seasonal Affective Disorder

### What is seasonal affective disorder (SAD)?<sup>1</sup>

Seasonal affective disorder (SAD) is a type of depression that comes and goes with the changing seasons. The most common form of SAD is called fall-onset SAD. This type of SAD begins in the fall and typically lasts through spring or early summer, often leading to this condition being called “winter depression” or “winter blues”. Seasonal affective disorder presents with the same symptoms of major depressive disorder. The cause of SAD is not fully understood; however, decreased sunlight during the winter months is believed to contribute to the development of SAD. Sunlight plays a role in the regulation of serotonin and melatonin, two chemicals that many SAD patients have difficulty regulating.



Five Ways to Treat Seasonal Affective Disorder [Internet]. Boston; [cited Dec 10]. Available from: <https://www.bostonmagazine.com/health/2017/01/29/how-to-treat-seasonal-affective-disorder/>

### Diagnosing SAD<sup>2</sup>

To be diagnosed with SAD, patients must exhibit symptoms of major depressive disorder that coincides with a certain season **for at least 2 years**. Patients must exhibit either depressed mood OR diminished interest/pleasure in things they normally enjoy AND at least 3 of the following symptoms:

- Changes in sleep patterns
- Feelings of guilt or worthlessness
- Decreased energy
- Difficulty concentrating
- Changes in appetite
  - Patients with fall-onset SAD tend to eat more (particularly sugary or starchy foods)
- Restlessness or impaired muscle movements
- Thoughts of suicide

## Who does seasonal affective disorder affect?<sup>3</sup>

- People who live further from the equator are more likely to develop SAD
  - 1% of the population of Florida experiences SAD while 9% of Alaskans report being impacted by SAD
  - This is related to the diminished amount of sunlight received as you approach the poles
- SAD affects women 4x as often as men
- Personal or family history of SAD or depression
- Age – Younger adults tend to be diagnosed with SAD more frequently than older adults

## How is SAD treated?

SAD can be treated a variety of ways including drug therapy and non-drug therapy techniques. It is important for patients to talk with their healthcare providers to find a plan that works for them.

- **Light therapy<sup>4</sup>**
  - Recommended as first line therapy in SAD
  - Patients are exposed to a bright fluorescent light (typically around 10,000 lux) that is designed to replace the sunlight that is lost during the winter months. Patients undergo light therapy every morning during the winter months for 30-60 minutes at a time
    - Patients often see improvement in 1-2 weeks
  - This type of therapy may be used alone in patients with mild-moderate SAD who are not having suicidal thoughts
  - Light therapy has been shown to be as effective as antidepressants



Miller M. Seasonal affective disorder: Bring on the light [Internet]. Harvard Health Publishing; 2012 Dec 21 [cited 2018 Dec 12]. Available from: <https://www.health.harvard.edu/blog/seasonal-affective-disorder-bring-on-the-light-201212215663>

- **Antidepressants<sup>5</sup>**
  - Selective Serotonin Reuptake Inhibitors (SSRIs)
    - Typically used as the first line drug therapy option for SAD
    - Zoloft<sup>®</sup> (sertraline) and Prozac<sup>®</sup> (fluoxetine) have the most evidence regarding efficacy in treating SAD<sup>6</sup>
    - These drugs are dosed at typical major depressive disorder dosages
  - Bupropion (Wellbutrin<sup>®</sup>) is the only drug with FDA approval for SAD prophylaxis

- Dosed at typical major depressive disorder dosages
  - These medication classes have been shown to decrease the depression scores of patients with SAD
    - May take 6-8 weeks before full results are seen
  - Since SAD typically presents with symptoms such as oversleeping and daytime drowsiness, sedating antidepressants, such as tricyclic antidepressants (TCAs) should be avoided <sup>7</sup>
- Timing of antidepressant therapy
  - The timeline for antidepressant therapy is patient specific
    - Many patients will take antidepressants only for the duration of the winter months and then discontinue the medications in the spring
      - In patients who utilize this strategy, it is recommended that the patient begin taking their antidepressant at least 4 weeks prior to the normal symptom start date in the fall and continue until early spring when their symptoms resolve
      - Patients are also advised to continue taking their medication for 2 weeks past the normal date of symptom remission to avoid relapse
    - Other patients will continue to take antidepressants year round

This is highly variable among patients and depends on severity of symptoms, side effects experienced, and average date of remission <sup>8</sup>

- **Psychotherapy<sup>3</sup>**
  - Cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) is considered to be an effective treatment for patients with SAD
    - These therapy sessions are tailored specifically for patients
    - These sessions train patients to replace negative thoughts with positive ones while simultaneously identifying winter activities that they enjoy and can partake in during these months

## Managing stress during the holidays

The holidays can be a stressful time. Between budgeting for gifts, travel, or visiting the in-laws, “the most wonderful time of the year” can quickly become “the most stressful time of the year”. Learning simple tips to manage these stressors is an easy way to make the holidays a more enjoyable time.

### What is stress?<sup>9</sup>

Stress is the body’s way of reacting to certain demands and affects everyone at some point during their life, whether it is during their daily routine or through a traumatic experience. While we have all experienced stress, we tend to have a negative view on stress. However, stress can actually be a positive force as well as a negative force. Short term stress can be beneficial as it can motivate us to perform at a higher level. On the other hand, long term stress can have negative effects on our mental and physical health. The longer the stress is present, the more detrimental it can become. Stress

management techniques are important tools to utilize in order to prevent the long term effects of chronic stress.

### Common reasons for stress around the holidays<sup>9</sup>

- Money
- Family issues
- Missing loved ones
- Work problems

### How stress presents<sup>10</sup>

- Effects on your mood
  - Irritable
  - Restlessness
  - Sad or depressed
  - Feeling overwhelmed
- Effects on your body
  - Headache
  - Fatigue
  - Sleep issues
  - Upset stomach
- Effects on your behavior
  - Changes in appetite
  - Increased alcohol intake or other substance use
  - Not exercising



Hunt A. 7 Supplements that are scientifically proven to help you deal with stress. [internet]. Walking Times. [updated 2018 Feb 15; cited 2018 Dec 12]. Available from: <http://www.theeventchronicle.com/health/7-supplements-scientifically-proven-help-deal-stress/#prettyPhoto>

### Managing Stress<sup>9</sup>

- Get Regular exercise
  - Try walking just 30 minutes a day
- Try relaxing activities
  - Yoga, tai chi, or deep breathing exercises may help relieve stress
- Stay connected
  - Ask a friend or a family member for help when needed as they can provide emotional support
- Set goal and priorities
  - Choose which tasks need to be completed immediately and which tasks can wait
  - Don't take on any new excess tasks that would overburden you during these busy times
  - Budget in advance! Don't wait until the last minute to make budgeting decisions

## New Year's resolutions and setting goals

With each New Year comes new resolutions! Around 40% of Americans will set a resolution for the upcoming New Year. Unfortunately, the overwhelming majority of Americans will have trouble maintaining their resolution beyond one month. One main factor for why people have trouble sticking to their resolutions is that they do not know how to set effective goals. The S.M.A.R.T. goal setting strategy explained below can help design effective goals that can be sustained long term.<sup>11</sup>

# SMART goal setting

## S - Specific

- Be clear with what you want to accomplish
- It will make it easier to focus and motivate yourself

## M - Measurable

- Having measurable goals will make it easier to track your progress

## A - Achievable

- Be realistic with your expectations
- Don't set yourself up for failure!

## R - Relevant

- Make sure your goal is something that is important to you

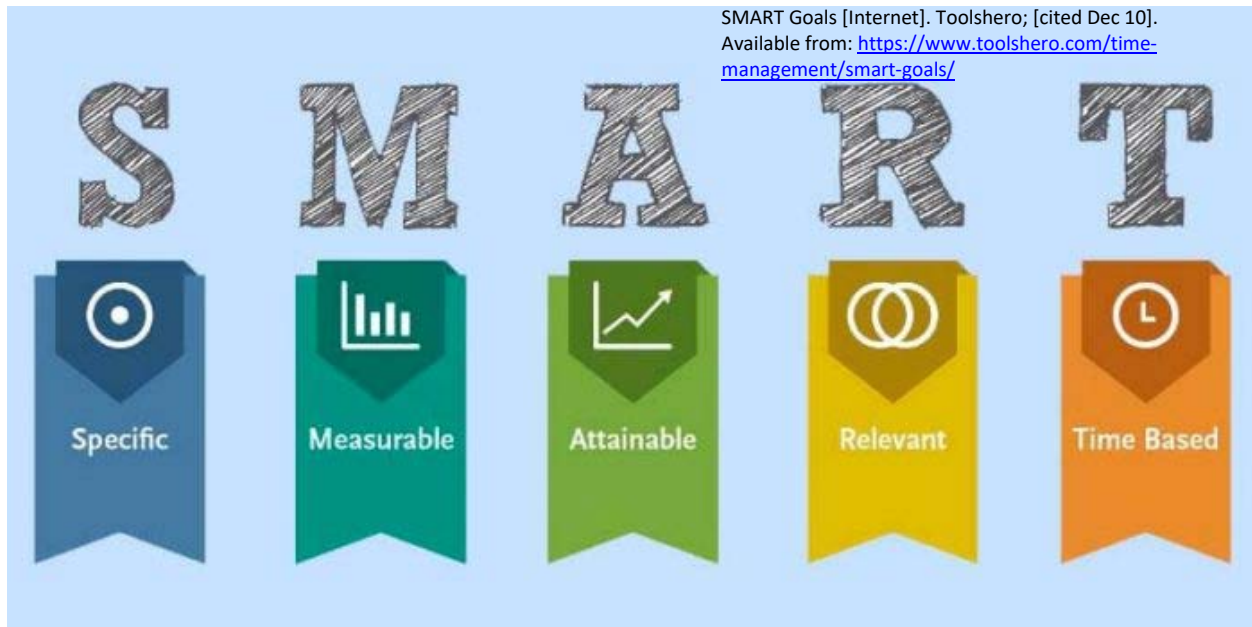
## T - Time Bound

- Have a deadline for when you want to complete your goal



Bucklin S. 5 New Year's resolutions you'll always break and how to change that [Internet]. 2016 Dec 30 [cited 2018 Dec 11]; Available from: <https://www.today.com/health/5-new-year-s-resolutions-you-ll-break-how-change-t106474>

# Examples of SMART goals vs non-SMART goals



SMART Goals [Internet]. Toolshero; [cited Dec 10]. Available from: <https://www.toolshero.com/time-management/smart-goals/>



## Weight loss

**Not SMART:** “I want to lose some weight”

**SMART:** “I want to lose 5 pounds by the end of this month. I will keep a daily log of how what I eat for each meal and track much weight I am losing weekly.”

## Exercise

**Not SMART:** “I’ll start exercising more often”

**SMART:** “I will start going to the gym 2 times per week for the month of January. One day I will lift weights and the other I will run cardio. I will keep a journal of which exercises I complete along with how much weight and how many repetitions. On cardio days, I will log how long I run for.”

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## The Last Dose

**"If we had no winter, the spring would not be so pleasant: if we did not sometimes taste of adversity, prosperity would not be so welcome."**

~ Anne Bradstreet [Early American poet, 1612 to 1672]

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