

# Surgeon's Corner November 2023



## Understanding and Managing Seasonal Depression Among Veterans

As we transition into the colder, shorter days of the year, many individuals, including our fellow veterans, may experience a noticeable shift in mood. Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD), a type of depression that occurs at a specific time of year, usually in the winter months, can have a significant impact on daily functioning and well-being.

Veterans may be particularly susceptible to SAD due to a combination of factors such as preexisting mental health conditions, the psychological toll of their service, and the stress of reintegration into civilian life. Recognizing the symptoms of SAD, which include low energy, overeating, social withdrawal, and a heavy, "leaden" feeling in the arms or legs, is crucial for timely intervention.

### Effective management of SAD often requires a multi-pronged approach:

1. Light Therapy: Exposure to bright light, especially in the morning, can help. More information can be found here: <https://www.va.gov/health/newsfeatures/2018/february/help-for-veterans-with-seasonal-affective-disorder.asp>
2. Psychotherapy: Cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) has been shown to be effective for SAD, helping to address negative thought patterns.
3. Medication: In some cases, antidepressant medications may be prescribed. It's essential to consult with your healthcare provider to determine the best course.
4. Lifestyle Adjustments: Regular exercise, a healthy diet, and maintaining a regular schedule can mitigate some symptoms of SAD.
6. Social Support: Staying connected with others is vital. Group therapy or support groups can be particularly helpful.

### The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs offers a variety of resources to help those coping with seasonal depression:

- VA Mental Health Services: Veterans can access services by contacting their local VA health care facility.
- Vet Centers: Offering counseling, outreach, and referral services to eligible veterans, helping them adjust to civilian life.
- My HealthVet: An online platform where veterans can manage health care, including scheduling appointments and refilling prescriptions.
- Telehealth Services: For those who may have difficulty leaving their homes during the winter months, the VA offers telehealth services.

In conclusion, seasonal depression is a significant condition that can greatly impact the quality of life for veterans. With the right resources and strategies, however, it can be managed effectively, allowing our veterans to lead fuller, more engaged lives throughout the year. Always consult with a healthcare provider for personal advice and treatments.

If you are in distress, call or text 988

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