



# Do Vermont Farmers Get SAD?

Yes, a percentage of the population does experience this type of “winter blues.” SAD- the acronym for Seasonal Affective Disorder- is the diagnostic name for the winter blues, and it is a type of depression that occurs at the same time every year. Symptoms begin in the fall and may continue into the winter months, sapping your energy and making you irritable. Symptoms of SAD include: depression, hopelessness, anxiety, low energy, a "leaden" feeling in the arms or legs, social withdrawal, oversleeping (up to 2.5 hours extra/day), loss of interest in activities you once enjoyed, a craving for foods high in carbohydrates, weight gain, and difficulty concentrating.

## WHAT CAUSES SEASONAL AFFECTIVE DISORDER?

The specific cause remains unknown, but a few related factors include:

- Your biological clock (circadian rhythm). The reduced level of sunlight in fall and winter may disrupt your body's internal clock which lets you know when you should sleep or be awake. This disruption of your circadian rhythm may lead to feelings of depression.
- Serotonin levels. A drop in serotonin, a brain chemical (neurotransmitter) that affects mood, might play a role. Reduced sunlight can cause a drop in serotonin that may trigger depression.
- Melatonin levels. The change in season can disrupt the balance of the natural hormone melatonin which plays a role in sleep patterns and mood.<sup>1</sup>

## DON'T JUST “TOUGH IT OUT”

Seasonal affective disorder can have serious consequences. Untreated, depression can lead to avoidance of farm business demands such as financial planning and tax preparation, over-spending, self-medication with alcohol or other drugs, family conflict or suicidal thoughts.

Your mood and functionality can be improved by taking recommended steps for the **full duration of diminished light** (usually from October to April). FARM FIRST can help you identify the issues and develop a strategy for handling SAD.

## WHAT YOU CAN DO

1. Stay connected to others. Talk with a trusted friend about your concerns.
2. Exercise outdoors, preferably with the early light of morning.
3. Sit closer to bright windows.
4. Talk to you physician.
5. Light boxes (phototherapy) may help and are best used in the morning.
6. **Call FARM FIRST at 1-877-493-6216** about this or any other question. We will help you develop a plan for addressing winter moods, get you information, give you free sessions, etc.

**FARM FIRST is for ALL VERMONT FARMERS! 1-877-493-6216**

Free, confidential and 24/7  
Website: [www.investeap.org](http://www.investeap.org) PW: *farm*

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/seasonal-affective-disorder/DS00195> 9/22/11