

A Newsletter for Employees | December 2024
By the Sutter Health Employee Assistance Program

Seasonal Solutions

Fittingly, the acronym for seasonal affective disorder is SAD. Affecting about 5% of the U.S. population during months of diminished sunlight, SAD is a lot like depression, except that it follows a seasonal pattern.

The Happy News

SAD is real, but you can help keep it at bay by preparing for reduced winter sunlight. Here are four ways:

- **Strive for a consistent sleep schedule.** As much as you're able, figure out how much sleep you need on a regular basis and then go to bed and wake up around the same time each day. Getting the amount of sleep that's right for you will help you handle dark and dreary days.
- **Get outside.** If the sun is out at lunchtime, take a walk around the block or your office complex and soak in as much sunlight as you can.
- **Socialize!** It's tempting to curl up in bed every night with a movie, but plan to go out once or twice a week to a well-lit, bustling spot. Meet up with a friend at a favorite lunch spot, work an afternoon in a coffee shop or stroll through a museum. Socializing helps prevent SAD by combating feelings of isolation, which are often exacerbated during darker winter months.
- **Consider treatments.** Studies support light therapy, cognitive behavioral therapy and antidepressant medication to combat SAD. Talk to your doctor to see if any of these options might be right for you.

When To See a Professional

Feeling sad is normal. However, be aware of red flags that indicate it's time to seek help from a professional. Ask yourself:

- Does my sadness come between me and the people I love, causing unwarranted arguments and distance?
- Is my sadness making me want to give up my professional and creative pursuits?
- Is my sadness affecting my health, causing, for example, weight changes, headaches or digestive problems?

Sutter EAP offers many resources to help. Call 800-477-2258 for a confidential conversation or visit sutterhealth.org/eap.

Think Outside the (Gift) Box

Traditions can be wonderful, but money concerns can make them stressful. Consider these lower-impact gift options, and if you're struggling with debt or want to work on budget goals for the new year, contact EAP to connect with a financial professional.

Investigate and Ideate

You might not be alone in your wish to alter the gift-giving habits of your family or other community. Do a little sleuthing—others might be just as open to alternatives. Maybe a “white elephant” exchange would be more fun than buying a gift for each person. Or draw names, so everyone buys just one meaningful gift for a specific person. Or gather a donation from each person to put toward a common charity, plan a big party or attend a special event together.

Allow Gift-Givers to Shine

Some people seem to be natural gift-givers. Rather than feel like you have to keep up, let them know you appreciate the time and care they put into it, and maybe enlist their help for your own gift-giving. The key is to appreciate their thoughtfulness without feeling competitive.

Give Coupons and Tickets

Gifts don't have to come in a box. Alternative gifts include tickets to special events, a prepaid spa treatment or homemade coupons for something you would do for the recipient, such as make coffee every morning for a month. Focus on what the person would truly like, and ideas will follow.

Traditions of Time

If you're a parent, think back to what made the holidays special for you as a child. You might find that the traditions you shared with family and friends stand out far more than the gifts you received. Here are a few classic traditions. Choose what's feasible for your family and enjoy making new memories.

- Make holiday cookies or ornaments.
- Volunteer for a charitable organization.
- String a garland of popcorn or paper snowflakes.
- Go see a tree lighting.
- Wear the same print or color and take holiday photos.

What is the EAP?

Sutter Health EAP provides referrals to licensed therapists who can help with personal problems that may impact your job, relationships or overall well-being. EAP is:

- Confidential.
- Open to eligible employees and family members.
- No charge to you.

**Call 800-477-2258 or
visit sutterhealth.org/eap.**

