



Beat the Winter Blues

Does your mood fall when the temperatures drop? If so, you're not alone. When the days get shorter and the temperatures get colder, many people start to feel sad, tired and irritable. For some people it can be the stress of the holidays or missing a loved one during this time of year. For others it can be a form of depression called **seasonal affective disorder** (SAD). SAD is more common in the northern states, which see fewer hours of daylight and more gray days during the cold winter months. Here are some things you can do to help beat a mild case of the winter blues:

- **Lighten up:** Open blinds or curtains to get more exposure to natural sunlight or invest in a light box.
- **Eat healthy:** Skip the candy and chips and choose fruits and vegetables instead.
- **Help others:** Check out ways to give back to the community by volunteering. Helping others has been shown to improve your mental health and life satisfaction.
- **Exercise:** Give your mood an endorphin boost with a good workout. You'll have more energy and you might meet a new friend at the gym.
- **Go outside:** Spending time outdoors (even if it's chilly) can lower stress and improve your mood. Grab your friends or family and take part in a fun winter activity like ice skating, snow tubing or skiing.
- **Plan a vacation:** Dreaming about a day at the beach? Plan a trip and feel the benefits before you board the plane. Research shows the simple act of planning a vacation can increase happiness instantly.

It's normal to have a few bad days, especially with the stress of the holidays and hectic schedules. But if you're feeling sad for days at a time and don't feel motivated to do routine activities, it's time to see your doctor.

Your Primary Care Provider

Choosing a primary care doctor is an important step in managing your health. Your primary care provider is the person you see for most of your medical needs – including routine health screenings, wellness visits and illnesses like a sore throat or ear infection. Establishing a long-term relationship with your provider will help them get to know you and your health care needs.

The most common types of providers practicing in primary care clinics include:

- **Family practice physicians.** These doctors specialize in taking care of the general health needs of people of all ages, from infancy through adulthood. They have a broad range of training in pediatrics, internal medicine, obstetrics and gynecology, psychiatry and geriatrics.
- **Internal medicine physicians.** These doctors specialize in diagnosing and treating diseases in adults. They do not perform surgery, deliver babies or treat children.
- **Obstetricians/Gynecologists (OB/GYN).** These doctors specialize in pregnancy and childbirth, and in the diseases and routine care of the female reproductive system.
- **Pediatricians.** These doctors specialize in taking care of the general health needs of children, from birth through age 21.

When choosing a doctor, you may want to consider their training and expertise, availability and location, as well as their approach to preventive medicine.

Finding a primary care provider in your network is easy. Just visit medica.com/members and enter your plan name.

Did You Know?

Group or policy number changes

If your Medica group or policy number changes when you renew your coverage, you'll need to re-register on mymedica.com when your new plan starts. In most cases, you'll get a new group or policy number if you change plans. You'll find your group or policy number on your ID card. You can access some of your previous health plan information for up to 18 months after your coverage ends – just log in using your previous [mymedica](https://mymedica.com) account information. If you would like to keep this year's health and wellness information, print out your results before the end of the year. This information will not carry over if your group or policy number changes during your new plan year. Also remember to provide your new ID card during a doctor office visit, trip to the pharmacy and health club (if you participate in FitChoices®, Medica's health club reimbursement program).

If your group or policy number stays the same as the previous year, you don't need to re-register on mymedica.com.

[Learn more about your new ID card.](#) | [Learn how to register on mymedica.com.](#)

Indoor Allergies Don't Take a Holiday

Having to be inside during the winter months can be challenging for people with indoor allergies. Mold, dust mites and pet dander are the most common indoor allergens. Symptoms of allergies include itchy eyes, sneezing, coughing and runny nose. Indoor allergies can sometimes be confused with a cold. However, a cold typically doesn't last for more than 10 days, while allergies can linger for weeks or even months.

The first step in treating allergies is finding out what's causing them and then avoiding those "triggers" as much as possible.

Tips to minimize exposure to indoor allergens

- Wash bedding in hot water once a week and invest in allergy-proof mattress covers, pillows and comforters
- Use a high-efficiency particulate air (HEPA) filter to remove dust and other particles from the air in your home
- Avoid down pillows and comforters
- Use a dehumidifier to keep humidity in your home below 50 percent
- Minimize contact with pets and keep them out of your bedroom

If your allergy symptoms last more than a week, talk to your doctor.

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