

2 Alzheimer's and Dementia

4 Light Therapy for Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD)

5 Beat the Seasonal Blahs by Helping Others

6 Winter Recipes

healthwise

a PERS Health Insurance Program newsletter | Winter 2024



Alzheimer's and Dementia

It's not easy to find out you have Alzheimer's disease or Dementia. But you're not alone. And... there are things you and your family can do so that you can live the best life possible.

Taking care of yourself

- If your doctor gives you medicines, take them exactly as prescribed. Call your doctor if you think you are having a problem with your medicine. You will get more details on the medicines your doctor prescribes.
- Eat a balanced diet. Get plenty of whole grains, fruits, and vegetables every day. If you are not hungry at mealtimes, eat snacks at midmorning and in the afternoon. Try drinks such as Boost, Ensure, or Sustacal if you are having trouble keeping your weight up.
- If you have trouble sleeping, do not nap during the day. Get regular exercise (but not within several hours of bedtime). Drink a glass of warm milk or caffeine-free herbal tea before going to bed.
- Stay active. Exercise such as walking may slow the decline of your mental abilities. Try to stay active mentally too. Read and work crossword puzzles if you enjoy these activities.
- Do tasks and activities during the time of day when you feel your best. It may help to develop a daily routine. Be patient. You may find that a task takes you longer than it used to.
- Post labels, lists, and sticky notes to help you remember things. Write your activities on a calendar you can easily find. Put your clock where you can easily see it.
- Ask your doctor about support groups and other resources in your area. They can help people who have Alzheimer's disease and their families.
- Do not drive unless you can pass an on-road driving test. If you are not sure if you are safe to drive, your state driver's license bureau can test you.
- Keep a cordless phone and a flashlight with new batteries by your bed. If possible, put a phone in each of the main rooms of your

house, or carry a cell phone in case you fall and cannot reach a phone. Or, you can wear a device around your neck or wrist. You push a button that sends a signal for help.

- If you have not already done so, make a list of advance directives. Advance directives are instructions to your doctor and family members about what kind of care you want if you become unable to speak or express yourself. Talk to a lawyer about making a will, if you do not already have one.

Keeping schedules

- Develop a routine. You will feel less frustrated or confused if you have a clear, simple plan of what to do every day.
 - Make lists of your medicines and when to take them.
 - Write down appointments and other tasks in a calendar.
 - Put sticky notes around the house to help you remember events and other things you have to do.
 - Schedule activities and tasks for times of the day when you are best able to handle them.

Staying safe

- Tell someone when you are going out and where you are going. Let the person know when you will be back. Before you go out alone, write down where you are going, how to get there, and how to get back home. Do this even if you have gone there many times before. Take someone along with you when possible.
- Make your home safe. Tack down rugs, put no-slip tape in the tub, use handrails, and put safety switches on stoves and appliances.
- Have a family member or other caregiver tell you whether you are driving badly. Deciding to stop driving is very hard for many people. Driving helps you feel

independent. Your state driver's license bureau can do a driving test if there is any question. Plan for other means of getting around when you are no longer able to drive.

- Use strong lighting, especially at night. Put night-lights in bedrooms, hallways, and bathrooms.
- Lower the hot water temperature setting to 120°F or lower to avoid burns.

Acknowledge your emotions and plan for the future

- Talk openly and honestly with your doctor.
- Let yourself grieve. It is common to feel angry, scared, frustrated, anxious, or depressed.
- Get emotional support from family, friends, a support group, or a counselor experienced in working with people who have dementia.
- Ask for help if you need it.
- Tell your doctor how you feel. You may feel upset, angry, or worried at times. Many things can cause this, including poor sleep, medicine side effects, confusion, and pain. Your doctor may be able to help you.

- Plan for the future.
 - Talk to your family and doctor about preparing a living will and other important papers while you can make decisions. These papers tell your doctors how to care for you at the end of your life.
 - Consider naming a person to make decisions about your care if you are not able to.

If you are a caregiver, you can benefit by learning as much as you can and taking care of yourself. Learn all you can about the type of dementia your loved one has and what the future may bring.

Organizations such as the Alzheimer's Association and the Family Caregiver Alliance can provide educational materials as well as information on support groups and services.

For more information visit: [Healthy Living - Health and Wellness Classes and Resources - 2024 \(kaiserpermanente.org\)](https://www.kaiserpermanente.org/healthy-living/health-and-wellness/classes-and-resources-2024).

Courtesy of Kaiser Permanente



Light Therapy for Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD)

What is Seasonal Affective Disorder?

Seasonal Affective Disorder, or SAD, is a type of recurring depression that comes and goes with the seasons, often beginning in the fall and continuing into the winter months when the days are shorter, and nights grow longer. SAD is thought to be related to changes in daylight, which can affect the body's internal clock and levels of certain chemicals in the brain. Treatment for SAD may include light therapy, counseling, and medication. Signs and symptoms of SAD tend to overlap with those of depression, though they differ person to person.

Symptoms may include:

- Persistent feelings of sadness, hopelessness, or emptiness
- Losing interest in activities you once enjoyed
- Changes in appetite or weight
- Difficulty sleeping or oversleeping
- Feeling sluggish or agitated
- Fatigue or low energy levels, even after sleeping well
- Difficulty concentrating or making decisions
- Withdrawal from social activities or relationships

Light Therapy for Treating SAD

Light therapy is a treatment for SAD involving sitting near a special lamp that mimics natural sunlight. Daily light therapy is thought to help regulate your body's internal clock by exposing your body to the bright light it misses out on during the dark winter months. This assists in the production and regulation of neurotransmitters like serotonin and melatonin which are affected by sunlight and strongly impact mood and energy. Light therapy can be used alone or in combination with other treatments. Research is mixed on its effectiveness, but considering light therapy is noninvasive and generally well-tolerated, it should be considered as a possible avenue to help manage SAD effectively.

What to Look for in a Light Box

- 10,000 lux brightness (20 times stronger than indoor lighting)
- Full spectrum light
- A filter to block out harmful UV rays
- The right size and style for your space

Recommendations for Use

- Use within an hour of waking.
- Start with 10-15 minutes, gradually increase to 30-60 minutes.
- Place the light 16-24 inches away, angled downward toward your eyes.
- Keep your eyes open but don't look directly at the light.
- Use daily for at least two weeks; adjusting duration if no improvement.

Use Caution If:

- You have bipolar disorder as light therapy can trigger mania symptoms. Consult with a therapist or medical provider first.
- You had laser surgery in the past 30 days.
- You have macular degeneration, cataracts, or glaucoma.
- You have a history of skin cancer.
- Your eyes are sensitive to light or vulnerable to light damage.
- You take photosensitive medications such as antibiotics or anti-inflammatories that increase your sensitivity to light.

Sources:

Seasonal affective disorder. National Institute of Mental Health. 2023. Accessed April 3, 2024. bit.ly/3YFCUn0.

Chen ZW, Zhang XF, Tu ZM. Treatment measures for seasonal affective disorder: A network meta-analysis. *J Affect Disord.* 2024 Apr 1;350:531-536. doi: 10.1016/j.jad.2024.01.028.

Seasonal Affective Disorder and Complementary Health Approaches: What the Science Says. NCCIH. December 2018. Accessed April 3, 2024. bit.ly/40pF0sm

Seasonal affective disorder treatment. Mayo Clinic. March 30, 2022. Accessed May 20, 2024. bit.ly/3Yn2hIR

Courtesy of Moda Health

Beat the Seasonal Blahs by Helping Others

Let's say it's winter. And it's yucky outside. And there's nothing on your calendar but empty space. You have the thought, "I should do something." But what is that something?

How about this: Volunteer. As you'll see, there are all sorts of benefits that come your way when you donate that most precious of commodities—your time.

Combat depression with action

A recent Mayo Clinic article shows that volunteering:

- Improves mental and physical health
- Gives a sense of purpose and teaches valuable skills
- Nurtures new and existing relationships

They cite research that shows "volunteering leads to lower rates of depression and anxiety, especially for people age 65 and older."

Volunteering reduces stress and increases positive, relaxed feelings by releasing dopamine. The New York Times calls it "an overlooked cure for loneliness," reporting that in one program, more than 85 percent of volunteers felt that their lives had improved because of their involvement.

Lots of jobs need doing

Let's say you're convinced, and you've decided you want to volunteer. A great first step is to check out [AmeriCorps Seniors](https://www.americorps.gov/serve/american-seniors). Each year, they match 140,000 volunteers with service opportunities at a variety of organizations, including many in your community. Anyone over 55 can serve.

Here are some examples from the AmeriCorps Seniors website:

- **Foster Grandparent Program:** Mentor and guide students to higher academic achievement. This program connects role models to students with exceptional needs.
- **RSVP:** With RSVP, you can use the skills and talents you've learned over the years, or develop new ones, while serving in a variety of volunteer activities in your community.

- **Senior Companion Program:** Serve as a friend and companion by providing assistance and friendship to seniors who have difficulty with daily living tasks. The program aims to keep seniors independent longer and provide respite to family caregivers.

And there are plenty of other options. You might help a child who is struggling learn to read, or deliver groceries to an elderly neighbor, or support a local family affected by a natural disaster.

Beyond the boost to your mental health, volunteering can be good for your physical well-being by getting you up and moving. And once your body and mind are in motion...bye-bye blahs!

Sources:

[NYTimes.com/2021/12/21/well/mind/loneliness-volunteering.html](https://www.nytimes.com/2021/12/21/well/mind/loneliness-volunteering.html)

[MayoClinicHealthSystem.org/hometown-health/speaking-of-health/3-health-benefits-of-volunteering](https://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-living/homework/healthy-living/3-health-benefits-of-volunteering)

[AmeriCorps.gov/serve/american-seniors](https://www.americorps.gov/serve/american-seniors)

Courtesy of PacificSource



Easy White Bean Soup with Sage

Ingredients

2 teaspoons extra-virgin olive oil
 1 large onion, chopped
 5 cloves of garlic, minced
 2 15-ounce cans of great northern white beans
 15 ounces of water
 1 vegetarian bouillon cube (to reduce sodium, use a low-sodium bouillon cube)
 3 tablespoons fresh sage leaves, chopped
 Black pepper, to taste

Directions

1. In a soup pot over medium heat, heat the oil and add onion and garlic. Cook until tender.
2. Add beans with water and bouillon.
3. Stir in sage and bring to boil, stirring occasionally. Lower heat and simmer for 20 minutes or until beans are soft.
4. Add pepper to taste.

Nutritional information (per serving)

Number of servings: 4

Calories	215
Total fat	2.5g
Cholesterol	0mg
Sodium	600mg
Total carbohydrate	36g
Protein	28g

Source:
[Easy White Bean Soup With Sage | Kaiser Permanente](#)
 Courtesy of Kaiser Permanente

Glazed Squash

A simple, 3-ingredient recipe to make any type of winter squash.

Ingredients

2 pounds winter squash (try acorn, butternut, delicata, or others)
 3 tablespoons brown sugar
 ¼ teaspoon each salt and pepper

Directions

1. Preheat oven to 400 degrees. Line a rimmed baking sheet with foil. Lightly grease the foil.
2. Rinse the squash, cut in half, and scoop out seeds. Cut squash into 1-inch-thick slices and lay on baking sheet.
3. In a small bowl, combine brown sugar, salt, and pepper. Sprinkle squash with half the seasoning mixture.
4. Bake until sugar has melted, about 4 to 6 minutes. Remove baking sheet from oven and turn squash slices over. Sprinkle remaining seasoning mixture over squash and return to the oven. Bake until squash is tender, about 15 to 20 minutes. Serve warm.
5. Refrigerate leftovers within 2 hours.

Nutritional information (per serving)

Serving size: ½ cup
 Number of servings: 6

Calories	80
Total fat	0g
Saturated fat	0g
Cholesterol	0mg
Sodium	105mg
Total carbohydrate	22g
Dietary fiber	5g
Sugars	7g
Protein	1g

Source: [Glazed Squash | Food Hero | Recipe](#)
 Courtesy of PacificSource



P.O. Box 40187
Portland, OR 97240-0187



PERS Health Insurance Program (PHIP)
pershealth.com
(503) 224-7377
(800) 768-7377
TTY: 711
Fax: (503) 765-3452 or (888) 393-2943