



## Seasonal Depression

Seasonal depression is a type of mood disorder that happens every year at the same time. A rare form of seasonal depression is known as "summer depression", it begins in late spring or early summer and ends in fall. Generally, seasonal affective disorder starts in fall or winter and ends in spring or early summer.

The exact cause of SAD is not known but some scientists think that certain hormones made deep in the brain trigger attitude-related changes at certain times of the year. Experts believe that SAD could be related to these hormonal changes.

One theory suggests that less sunlight during fall and winter leads to the brain making less serotonin, a chemical linked to brain pathways that regulate mood. Depressive symptoms such as low mood, fatigue and weight gain have been linked to the

abnormal functioning of nerve cell pathways located in the brain that regulate mood.

SAD is a type of major depressive disorder wherein individuals experience emotional, behavioural and cognitive symptoms. These symptoms include feelings of hopelessness and worthlessness, thoughts of suicide, loss of interest in activities, withdrawal from social interaction, sleep and appetite issues, difficulty concentrating and making decisions, decreased libido, lack of energy, or agitation. More specifically, symptoms of winter SAD often include difficulty waking up in the morning or oversleeping, nausea, and a tendency to overeat, craving for carbohydrates, which leads to weight gain.

SAD is usually associated with winter depression, but springtime lethargy or other seasonal mood patterns are not uncommon. People who experience



spring and summer depression are likely to exhibit symptoms such as insomnia, decreased appetite and weight loss, and agitation or anxiety.

Spring and summer can bring on symptoms of mania or hypomania (a less intense form of mania) in some people with bipolar disorder, and fall and winter can be a time of depression.

There is over production of the hormone melatonin in people with SAD. Darkness causes increase in the production of melatonin, which regulates sleep. Melatonin production increases as winter days become shorter, leaving people with SAD to feel sleepier and more lethargic, often with delayed circadian rhythms.

People with SAD also produce less Vitamin D. Vitamin D is believed to play a role in the serotonin activity. Deficiency of Vitamin D may be associated with clinically significant depression symptoms.

The onset of SAD usually begins in young adulthood and is more common in women than men. Some people with SAD might have mild symptoms and may

feel out of sorts or irritable. Others have worse symptoms that usually interfere with relationships and work. Since lack of enough daylight during winter time is related to SAD, it's less likely to occur in countries where there's plenty of sunlight all year around.

Seasonal depression can be treated by using traditional antidepressants. The only medicine that is FDA-

approved specifically used to prevent major depressive episodes in people with SAD is Bupropion XL. Many doctors suggest that people with SAD should get outside early in the morning to get more natural light. Antidepressant medications or light therapy (photo therapy) may help if doing this is impossible because of the dark winter months. Other techniques that can be used for treating SAD are ionised-air administration, cognitive-behavioural therapy and carefully timed supplementation of the hormone melatonin.

It is normal to feel down on some days. But if this feeling continues for days at a time and you are not motivated to do activities you normally enjoy, it is better to see a doctor. This is especially important if there is a change in your sleep patterns and appetite, or if you turn to alcohol for comfort or relaxation, or you feel hopeless or think about suicide.



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