

Seasonal Affective Disorder

Tips to Help Keep Your Health On Track!

While people are generally aware of the various reasons people become depressed, they may not be as familiar with seasonal affective disorder, or what is commonly referred to as SAD. Individuals with SAD experience it each year at about the same time. Symptoms, which include depression, low energy, and mood swings, begin in the fall and last into winter. Although not as common, SAD can also affect some people in the spring or early summer. Treatment for this disorder can include light therapy, various medications, and psychotherapy. If you experience this type of seasonal depression, speak to your doctor so they can provide you with the right steps to stay healthy all year. ⁽¹⁾

What are some of the causes of SAD? ⁽¹⁾

- **Biological clock** – Winter-onset SAD may develop because of less sunlight in fall and winter. It's believed that this decrease possibly disrupts the body's internal clock, leading to feelings of depression.
- **Melatonin levels** – The body's level of melatonin affects sleep patterns and mood; SAD may disturb this level.
- **Serotonin levels** – Serotonin is a brain chemical (neurotransmitter) that affects your mood. Less sun exposure can cause a drop in your serotonin levels that can cause depression.

What are some of the symptoms of SAD?

Some of the signs and symptoms of SAD include: ⁽¹⁾

- Depression; low energy
- Problems sleeping; difficulty concentrating
- Changes in your diet or weight
- Feelings of worthlessness, hopelessness, or guilt
- Thoughts of death or suicide

What are some of the symptoms of SAD more specific to fall and winter? ⁽¹⁾

- Oversleeping or not wanting to get out of bed
- Changes in appetite; abnormal craving for foods high in carbohydrates
- Weight gain
- Fatigue, lazy feeling, and no energy

What are some of the symptoms of SAD more specific to spring and summer? ⁽¹⁾

- Insomnia
- Loss of appetite
- Weight loss
- Anxiety or feelings of agitation

What are some of the risk factors of experiencing SAD? ⁽¹⁾

- **Major depression or bipolar disorder** – If you already have been diagnosed with depression or bipolar disorder, there may be an increased likelihood that your depression will worsen during seasonal changes.
- **Family history** – People who are diagnosed with SAD are more likely to have blood relatives who have experienced SAD or other forms of depression.
- **Reside a distance away from the equator** – SAD appears to affect more people who reside far north or far south of the equator. This may be attributed to the decrease in sunlight during the winter and the longer days during the summer.

What problems can SAD lead to if it goes untreated? ⁽¹⁾

- Substance and/or alcohol abuse
- Withdrawal from social situations
- Problems at work or school
- Other mental health issues, such as anxiety, eating disorders, and suicidal thoughts or behavior

When should I seek medical attention?

Consider making an appointment to see your doctor if you are experiencing any of the following: ⁽¹⁾

- If you feel depressed for days and you no longer participate in your normal daily activities
- Your sleep schedule and appetite have noticeably changed
- You are self-medicating with drugs and/or alcohol or you are contemplating suicide

⁽¹⁾ www.mayoclinic.org

This is informational only, not a replacement for the medical advice of your physician.
November 2019