



Seasonal Depression

Seasonal affective disorder (SAD) is a type of depression that is tied to seasons of the year. Most people with SAD are depressed only during the late fall and winter (sometimes called the “winter blues”) and not during the spring or summer. A small number, however, are depressed only during the late spring and summer.

SAD is most common in young adult women, although it can affect men or women of any age. In North America, SAD may affect as many as 6 of every 100 people, more in the Northern portions of the country than in the South. Another 10-20% of people may have a milder form of seasonal mood change.

Like all types of depression, SAD can have a devastating effect on a person’s life. Fortunately, almost all people with SAD can be helped with available therapies.

Seasonal Depression Causes

The exact causes of seasonal affective disorder (SAD) are unknown.

- Chemical changes in the brain caused by changes in the amount of sunlight are probably involved. People who live in geographical locations that are dark or cloudy during the winter are most likely to have SAD.
- A tendency to have SAD may run in some families.

Seasonal Depression Symptoms

Most people have only some of these symptoms, not all.

- Depressed mood
- Loss of interest in usually enjoyable activities
- Fatigue or loss of energy
- Feelings of worthlessness or hopelessness
- Poor concentration, indecisiveness
- Recurrent thoughts of death or suicide



The symptoms of SAD come back every year, and for any specific person, they tend to come and go at about the same time each year.

Symptoms of winter SAD

- Sleeping more than usual
- Craving for sugar, starchy foods, or alcohol
- Weight gain
- Irritability
- Conflicts with other people
- Heaviness of arms and legs
- Behavior disturbances (in children)



People with winter SAD may seek out light places or sunlight, or like to have lots of artificial lights on.

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