

Treatments¹

Treatment for seasonal affective disorder may include light therapy, medications and psychotherapy.

Light therapy

In light therapy, also called phototherapy, you sit a few feet from a specialized light therapy box so that you're exposed to bright light. Light therapy mimics outdoor light and appears to cause a change in brain chemicals linked to mood.

Lifestyle and home remedies

There are some measures you can do on your own that may help, such as:

- ◆ **Make your environment sunnier and brighter.** Open blinds, add skylights and trim tree branches that block sunlight. Sit closer to bright windows while at home or in the office.
- ◆ **Get outside.** Take a long walk, eat lunch at a nearby park, or simply sit on a bench and soak up the sun. Even on cold or cloudy days, outdoor light can help — especially if you spend some time outside within two hours of getting up in the morning.
- ◆ **Exercise regularly.** Physical exercise helps relieve stress and anxiety, both of which can increase seasonal affective disorder symptoms. Being more fit can make you feel better about yourself, too, which can lift your mood.

Alternative medicine

Several herbal remedies, supplements and mind-body techniques are commonly used to relieve depression symptoms. It's not clear how effective these treatments are for seasonal affective disorder, but there are several that may help. Keep in mind, alternative treatments alone may not be enough to relieve your symptoms. Some alternative treatments may not be safe if you have other health conditions or take certain medications.

Nutritional and dietary supplements used to treat depression include:

- ◆ **St. John's wort.** This herb has traditionally been used to treat a variety of problems, including depression. It may be helpful if you have mild or moderate depression. St. John's wort can interact with medications for other conditions, especially antidepressants. Talk to your doctor before taking this supplement to make sure they're safe for you.
- ◆ **Melatonin.** This natural hormone helps regulate mood. A change in the season may change the level of melatonin in your body. Some people try taking melatonin supplements, but discuss this with your health care provider first before doing so.
- ◆ **Omega-3 fatty acids.** Omega-3 fatty acid supplements have been shown to relieve depression symptoms in some studies. Sources of omega-3s include fatty, cold-water fish, such as salmon, mackerel and herring. Flaxseed, flax oil and walnuts also contain omega-3 fatty acids, and small amounts are found in soybean and canola oils.

Mind-body therapies that may help relieve depression symptoms include:

- ◆ Yoga
- ◆ Meditation
- ◆ Guided imagery
- ◆ Massage therapy



References

1 <http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/seasonal-affective-disorder/DS00195/DSECTION=alternative-medicine>

Winter Blues



Seasonal Affective Disorder (S.A.D.)



<http://www.ncpamd.com/>

What is S.A.D.? ¹

Seasonal affective disorder (also called SAD) is a type of depression that occurs at the same time every year. If you're like most people with seasonal affective disorder, your symptoms start in the fall and may continue into the winter months, sapping your energy and making you feel moody. Less often, seasonal affective disorder causes depression in the spring or early summer.

Don't brush off that yearly feeling as simply a case of the "winter blues" or a seasonal funk that you have to tough out on your own — you may have seasonal affective disorder. Treatment for seasonal affective disorder includes light therapy (phototherapy), psychotherapy and medications. Addressing the problem can help you keep your mood and motivation steady throughout the year.

Seasonal affective disorder is a cyclic, seasonal condition. This means that signs and symptoms come back and go away at the same time every year. Usually, seasonal affective disorder symptoms appear during late fall or early winter and go away during the sunnier days of spring and summer. Some people have the opposite pattern and become depressed with the onset of spring or summer. In either case, problems may start out mild and become more severe as the season progresses.

When to see a doctor

It's normal to have some days when you feel down. But if you feel down for days at a time and you can't seem to get motivated to do activities you normally enjoy, see your doctor. This is particularly important if you notice that your sleep patterns and appetite have changed or if you feel hopeless, think about suicide, or find yourself turning to alcohol for comfort or relaxation.

S.A.D. Symptoms ¹

Fall and winter seasonal affective disorder (winter depression) symptoms include:

- ◆ Depression
- ◆ Hopelessness
- ◆ Anxiety
- ◆ Loss of energy
- ◆ Social withdrawal
- ◆ Oversleeping
- ◆ Loss of interest in activities you once enjoyed
- ◆ Appetite changes, especially a craving for foods high in carbohydrates
- ◆ Weight gain
- ◆ Difficulty concentrating and processing information

Spring and summer seasonal affective disorder (summer depression) symptoms include:

- ◆ Anxiety
- ◆ Trouble sleeping (insomnia)
- ◆ Irritability
- ◆ Agitation
- ◆ Weight loss
- ◆ Poor appetite
- ◆ Increased sex drive



<http://www.lightfortherapy.com/>

Causes ¹

The specific cause of seasonal affective disorder remains unknown. It's likely, as with many mental health conditions, that genetics, age and, perhaps most importantly, your body's natural chemical makeup all play a role in developing the condition. A few specific factors that may come into play include:

- ◆ **Your biological clock (circadian rhythm).** The reduced level of sunlight in fall and winter may disrupt your body's internal clock, which lets you know when you should sleep or be awake. This disruption of your circadian rhythm may lead to feelings of depression.
- ◆ **Melatonin levels.** The change in season can disrupt the balance of the natural hormone melatonin, which plays a role in sleep patterns and mood. Talk to your doctor to see whether taking melatonin supplements is a good option.
- ◆ **Serotonin levels.** A drop in serotonin, a brain chemical (neurotransmitter) that affects mood, might play a role in seasonal affective disorder. Reduced sunlight can cause a drop in serotonin, perhaps leading to depression.

Risk Factors ¹

Factors that may increase your risk of seasonal affective disorder include:

- ◆ **Being female.** Some studies show that seasonal affective disorder is diagnosed more often in women than in men, but that men may have more-severe symptoms.
- ◆ **Living far from the equator.** Seasonal affective disorder appears to be more common among people who live far north or south of the equator. This may be due to decreased sunlight during the winter, and the longer days of summer.
- ◆ **Family history.**