

Seasonal Affective Disorder

What is seasonal affective disorder?

Seasonal affective disorder is a type of depression that tends to occur (and reoccur) as the days grow shorter in the fall and winter. It is believed that affected persons react adversely to the decreasing amounts of light and the colder temperatures as the fall and winter progress. It is important to note that although seasonal affective disorders usually presents in the fall and winter, there are those who suffer from this condition during the summer instead of, or in addition to the fall or winter.

Seasonal affective disorder has not been long recognized as a medical condition. The term first appeared in print in 1985. Seasonal affective disorder is also sometimes called winter depression, winter blues, or the hibernation reaction.

The incidence of seasonal affective disorder increases in people who are living farther away from the equator. Seasonal affective disorder is less common where there is snow on the ground. It is more common in women than in men. People of all ages can develop seasonal affective disorder.



What are the symptoms of seasonal affective disorder?

Symptoms of seasonal affective disorder include tiredness, fatigue, depression, crying spells, irritability, trouble concentrating, body aches, loss of sex drive, poor sleep, decreased activity level and overeating. When the condition presents in the summer, the symptoms are more commonly insomnia, poor appetite and weight loss, in addition to irritability, difficulty concentrating and crying spells. In several instances, seasonal affective disorder can be associated with thoughts of suicide.

The symptoms of seasonal affective disorder typically tend to begin in the fall each year, lasting until spring. The symptoms are more intense during the darkest months.

What causes seasonal affective disorder?

Seasonal affective disorder seems to develop from inadequate bright light during the winter months. Researchers have found that bright light changes the chemicals in the brain. Exactly how this occurs and the details of its effects are being studied.