

Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD)

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Seasonal affective disorder (SAD), also known as **winter depression**, **winter blues**, **summer depression**, **summer blues**, or **seasonal depression**, is considered a mood disorder in which people who have normal mental health throughout most of the year experience depressive symptoms in the winter or summer. SAD, is a type of depression that occurs during the same season each year. You may have SAD if you felt depressed during the last two winters but felt much better in spring and summer.

Anyone can get SAD, but it's more common in:

- Women.
- People who live far from the equator, where winter daylight hours are very short.
- People between the ages of 15 and 55. The risk of getting SAD for the first time goes down as you age.
- People who have a close relative with SAD.

What causes SAD?



Experts think it may be caused due to lack of sunlight.

Lack of light may:

- Upset your "biological clock," which controls your sleep-wake pattern and other circadian rhythms.
- Cause problems with serotonin, a brain chemical that affects mood.

Causes of Depression



While it is not clear what specifically causes depression, a widely accepted theory is a change in brain structure and chemistry. Specifically, substances called **neurotransmitters** are out of balance in depressed people. Possible causes for the imbalance include seasonal changes ,certain medications, alcohol or substance abuse, hormonal , enduring a traumatic event, like being the victim of abuse or losing a loved one or a job.

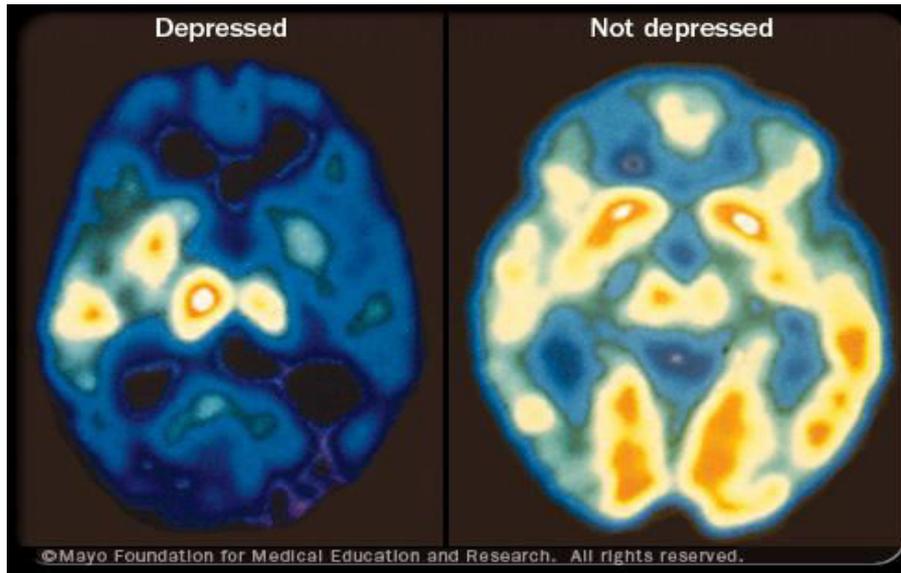
What are the symptoms?

If you have SAD, you may:

- Feel sad, grumpy, moody, or anxious.
- Lose interest in your usual activities.
- Eat more and crave carbohydrates.
- Gain weight.
- Sleep more but still feel tired.
- Have trouble concentrating.

Symptoms come and go at about the same time each year. Most people with SAD start to have symptoms in September or October and feel better by April or May.

What Is Depression?



Major depression is a period of sadness, irritability, or low motivation that occurs with other symptoms, lasts at least two weeks in a row, and is severe enough to negatively affect one's life. Depression is not a sign of weakness or a character flaw. It is a real and treatable medical illness.

These scans of the brain indicate low activity in a person suffering from depression compared to someone who is not depressed.

Depression: Emotional Symptoms



The most prominent symptoms of depression are usually a sad or irritable mood and/or loss of interest in all or most activities that used to be pleasurable. Patients may also experience guilt despite having done nothing wrong, as well as feeling worthless, hopeless, and/or have recurring thoughts of wanting to die, kill, or otherwise harm themselves, as in cutting or burning themselves. The baby's well-being may become at risk since a depressed mother may have trouble enjoying, bonding with, and caring for her infant.

Depression: Physical Symptoms



Depression can sometimes be associated with physical symptoms.

- Tiredness and low energy level
- Trouble sleeping, particularly early morning waking
- Sleeping too much
- Aches or pains, especially headaches, muscle cramps, or digestive problems (for example, stomachaches, diarrhoea or constipation) that do not improve even with pain focused treatment

Depression can worsen many other medical problems, especially those that cause chronic pain. Certain brain chemicals affect pain and mood.

Depression: Appetite Symptoms



Some individuals with depression experience an increase or decrease in appetite, which may lead to substantial loss or gain in weight.

Left untreated, the symptoms of depression can negatively impact the sufferer's activities, relationships, and career. Depressed people often have trouble concentrating and making decisions. They may stop participating in activities they used to enjoy as well as no longer spending time with loved ones. In severe cases, depression can be fatal as the result of homicide or suicide.

Warning Signs of Suicide



People with depression are at risk for trying to commit suicide. Warning signs may include talking about suicide or dying, threatening to hurt others, becoming irritable or taking excessive risks, giving away personal belongings, or otherwise settling personal affairs.

Any warning signs for suicide should be taken very seriously and immediate help should be sought

Depression in Children



Depression afflicts 2% of children in grade school and about 10% of teens .It can impair the child or adolescent's friendships and school performance. Many of the symptoms are similar to those in depressed adults, but depression can be harder to diagnose in children, partly because they may revert to earlier behaviors (regress), seem angry, or engage in risky behaviors.

Preschoolers Can Suffer From Depression, Too



How is it treated?

Light Therapy (Phototherapy)



Light therapy, also called phototherapy, can be an effective treatment for SAD and other types of depression. This form of treatment involves sitting in front of a medical light box that emits a specific kind of light for several minutes per day.

Be Sure You Get Enough Sunlight

Another option we have is Talk Therapy

Eat Smart to Lift Mind and Body



A healthy diet can be part of an overall treatment plan. Build your diet around plenty of fruits, vegetables, and whole grains to help boost your physical and emotional health.

Serotonin is a brain chemical that enhances your sense of well-being. Carbohydrates raise the level of serotonin in your brain. Low-fat carbs such as popcorn, a baked potato, pasta are options. Vegetables, fruit, and whole grain options also provide fiber.

Medications for Depression



Many medications, antidepressants, are effective for the treatment of depression. These medications affect the levels of brain chemicals, like **serotonin** and **norepinephrine**. It may take some weeks to feel the positive effect of these medications, so it is important to remain vigilant in taking them and working with a doctor in the process.

Exercise for Depression



Studies show that moderate exercise can be an important part of alleviating mild to moderate depression because it causes the release of chemicals called **endorphins** that tends to elevate mood and self-esteem, decrease stress, increase energy level, and improve sleep.

St. John's Wort for Depression



St. John's wort is an herbal supplement that has been found to be a potential help for mild depression

Pets for Depression

Pets relieve stress by providing love and companionship. Research shows that animal-assisted therapy can also decrease agitation that often goes with depression.



The Role of Social Support



Since loneliness often accompanies depression, having good relationships and social support can be an important part of recovery from this illness. Having regular contact with loved ones, Spiritual connect at a place of worship or just believing in a power bigger than oneself, can help decrease depression as well.

Transcranial Magnetic Stimulation

With rTMS, physicians aim electromagnetic currents at the skull to stimulate a small electrical current in a part of the brain linked to depression.



Vagus Nerve Stimulation (VNS)

VNS requires the surgical insertion of an electrical device that alleviates depression by inducing a normal electrical pattern in the brain by sending electrical pulses through the vagus nerve in the neck.



Good Outlook



While afflicted with the symptoms of major depression, one might feel hopeless and unable to function. **However, this condition is quite treatable and as much as 80% of people with the condition recover with the help of medication, talk therapy, or both forms of treatment.** For those who do not improve with those traditional treatments, interventions like VNS, ECT, or rTMS can bring significant relief for many people.