

Seasonal Affective Disorder



1919 University Avenue West, Suite 400, St. Paul, MN 55104 Tel. 651-645-2948 or 888-NAMIHELPS www.namihelps.org

Some people experience symptoms of depression only at certain times of the year. Those with Seasonal affective disorder (SAD) experience depression in fall or winter and experience a higher mood the rest of the year.

What are the patterns/symptoms of SAD?

Symptoms of SAD usually begin in October or November and last until March or April. Some with SAD may feel depressed for longer or shorter. Depressions are usually mild to moderate, but they can be severe. Although some individuals do not necessarily show these signs, the classic signs of SAD include:

- Sleeping a lot
- Feeling tired during the day
- Weight gain
- Lack of interest in sex
- Lack of interest in activities
- Isolation from social groups
- Feeling hopeless
- Suicidal thoughts

In some cases, symptoms occur in the summer rather than winter. During that period, the depression is more likely to be characterized by:

- Difficulty sleeping
- Changes in appetite and weight
- Feeling agitation or anxious

In fewer cases, a patient may experience both winter and summer depressions, while feeling fine each fall and spring. Many people with SAD also report that their depression returns whenever there is “less light around.”

Treatments

Many people with SAD will find that their symptoms respond to a very specific treatment called light therapy. In light therapy, person will spend approximately 30 minutes sitting in front of a “light box,” which artificially simulates sunlight. Other options are:

- **Medication**, such as antidepressants are used.
- **Psychotherapy**, such as cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT)