



INFO SHEET

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What is Seasonal Affective Disorder ?

Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD), also known as the "winter blues," is the commonly used descriptor for a subtype of depression that generally occurs during the winter months when there is less daylight.

However, it can also occur in the summer months.

Seasonally related depressive symptoms include loss of energy, hypersomnia, overeating, weight gain, and a craving for carbohydrates (APA 2022).

The exact cause of SAD is not known, but it is thought to be related to changes in the body's natural circadian rhythms and the production of the hormone melatonin. The prevalence of the winter-type seasonal pattern of depression appears to vary with latitude, age, and sex. Prevalence increases with higher latitudes. Age is also a strong predictor of seasonality, with *younger persons* at higher risk for *winter depressive episodes* (APA 2022).

About 5 percent of adults in the U.S. experience SAD and it typically lasts about 40 percent of the year. It is more common among women than men (Torres, 2020). In Australia the adult prevalence is much smaller, at about [0.33%](#) or about 1 in 300.

If you have noticed that your mood is lower in winter or that you don't feel as good as in summer, it may be worth talking to a health professional. It may be that

you are affected by the change in seasons. It also may not be. Change in mood may be linked to reduced activity levels because of change in weather and the change in the number of social activities that occur in summer compared to winter. It may also be that your circumstances change, for example seasonal workers who are not working as much in winter may feel low.

Treatments

There are several treatments available for depression that occur seasonally, including [light therapy](#) (Pjrek et al 2020), which involves sitting in front of a special light box that simulates natural daylight. Other treatments may include psychotherapy, medication, or a combination of therapies. Cognitive Behavioural therapy (CBT) is also effective for treating seasonally related depression (Torres, 2020). It has also been shown to have protective effects for future winters (Evans et al. 2013).

If you or someone you know is experiencing symptoms of SAD, the winter blues, or depression it is important to seek help from a mental health professional. The Centre for Clinical Psychology in Melbourne offers evidence-based treatments for depression and other mental health concerns. To make an appointment, call 03 9077 0122 or book online at <https://ccp.net.au/booking/>.

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