

Seasonal Affective Disorder

Signs and Symptoms:

- depression caused by a specific season of the year, most often winter
- headaches
- irritability
- low energy level
- crying spells

Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD) is an extreme form of the 'winter blahs'. True forms of this disorder are unusual; most people with 'cabin fever' do not have SAD.

The person who has SAD tends to sleep a great deal in the winter. They may gain a great deal of weight because they gorge on carbohydrates. Low on energy and highly irritable, they get many headaches, feel very stressed and may have a lot of crying spells.

The cause of SAD is not yet known, but it may be linked to the body's biological clock, which controls temperature and hormone production. It usually begins in adolescents or young adults and is more common among women than men. Some people 'outgrow' it, but more likely it will last a lifetime.

A recent innovation in the treatment of SAD uses specially designed fluorescent bulbs for light therapy.

This type of depression can strike at any age.

Situational Depression

Signs and Symptoms:

- sense of helplessness and gloom
- grief
- loss of self-esteem
- feeling that life is meaningless
- anxiety or worry
- irritability
- retreat from relationships with others

Situational depression is a prolonged episode of 'the blues' that may occur after a disappointment or loss, or during mid-life. This depression is not the same as normal grieving after the death of a loved one, illness, or other misfortune, although it may be triggered by such an event.



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DEPRESSION

Hope gives you the strength to keep going,
When you feel like giving up.
Don't ever quit believing in yourself.
As long as you believe you can,
You will have a reason for trying.
Don't let bad moments overcome you.
Be patient, and they will pass.
Don't hesitate to reach out for help,
We all need it from time to time.

The emotional and physical symptoms of depression are notable for their persistence. Many people experiencing depression find it hard to do anything at all, even to get up enough energy to call a doctor. But taking that first step may start them on the road to recovery.

People experiencing depression may have thoughts of suicide. Doctors believe that depression is the illness that underlies the majority of suicides in Canada.

AGE ASSOCIATED FEATURES

Early Childhood: separation anxiety is a common factor

Early Adolescence: negative and antisocial behaviour

Older Teens: exhibit sexual acting out, truancy and running away

Elderly People: loss of intellectual functioning

COMMON SYMPTOMS

- Withdrawal from usual activities
- Disturbed sleep
- Loss of appetite
- Inability to concentrate or make decisions
- Decreased energy level
- Feelings of worthlessness and guilt
- Thoughts of suicide and death

KINDS OF DEPRESSION

Major Depressive Disorder

Signs and Symptoms:

- change in physical demeanor, either a noticeable slowing down or 'dragging', or a discernible speeding up or agitation
- distinct quality to the depressed mood (different from the feeling after the death of a loved one)
- lack of response to environmental changes (day/ night, sun/rain, leisure/work)
- loss of interest in activities usually enjoyed, including sex
- fatigue or loss of energy
- poor appetite and attendant weight loss
- insomnia or hyper-somnia
- self-reproach or inappropriate guilt
- suicidal behavior
- hallucinations or delusions
- no apparent 'trigger' (precipitating event)

A major depressive disorder is not merely sadness or grief but a genuine psychiatric illness that affects both mind and body.

Stricken with much more desperate feelings than merely the 'blues' or being 'down in the dumps', a person may become incapacitated, unable to hold a steady job, derive no pleasure from life and have difficulty interacting with others.

Some of the physical symptoms are a characteristic hollowness around the eyes, uninflected speech and a slowed gait.

This type of depression is considered serious as it is both debilitating and associated with suicidal tendencies. It is more common among women than men.

Manic-depressive Illness (Also known as bipolar disorder)

Signs and Symptoms:

- alternating pattern of emotional highs (characterized by high-spirited behavior) and emotional lows
- the manic and major depression episodes may alternate rapidly every few days
- symptoms of depression are prominent and last for a full day or more

Manic depressive illness is characterized by recurring periods of mental illness in which episodes of excitement and hyperactivity (mania) either occur alone or alternate with periods of depression.

Everyone has moods, but extreme and unpredictable mood swings from highly excited euphoria to the darkest depths of despair and depression characterize bipolar disorder.

In most people, mood changes are a response to events in the environment, but when elation or depression occurs without relation to the circumstances, this is manic-depressive illness.

Feelings may become so intense that they take over completely; there is loss of contact with the real world. This person will need to be hospitalized. Speech and thoughts seem to run at high speed, so fast they can't be understood.

Self-esteem will soar and hyperactivity is likely. They are not able to judge the consequences of their actions. Mood changes are frequent, alternately laughing and crying, with fleeting delusions and/or hallucinations.