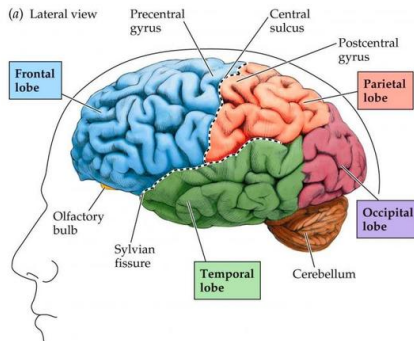


# Your Health

## Seasonal Affective Disorder by Niru Prasad, MD

This is a type of depression that affects an individual during winter months, also known as winter blues.

### Incidence



This is a type of depression that affects individuals of all ages starting from teens to elderly, and is linked to darkness during winter the winter months. Furthermore, researchers have proven the fact that people living far from the equator in locations such as Alaska, where daylight is very short, are more susceptible.

People between the ages of 15 to 55 years are more susceptible to seasonal affective disorder. Elderly people living alone are also more prone.

Sometime people with close relatives with similar entity are pre disposed to depressions.

Stress and anxiety always precipitates and aggravates depression.

### What Are The Causes?

1. Our brain secretes a hormone melatonin from the pineal gland in brain. This helps other hormones in body thus regulates the circadian rhythm. During darkness body secretes more melatonin which causes depression. An exposure to bright light during winter reduces the production of this hormone, hence mood gets better. Also, researchers have proven the fact that melatonin level is related to aging, and young children have the highest level of night time melatonin. Hence, their night time sleep is longer compared to the elderly population.
2. Melatonin also has an anti-oxidant effect hence boost up the immune system.
3. Our brain cells send chemical messengers through three neurotransmitters. Serotonin, dopamine and norepinephrine control the activities in an individual. Serotonin plays a role in controlling our mood, sexual activity and sleep.
4. Norepinephrine is a brain chemical that plays important role in attention regulation of blood pressure.
5. Numerous studies in past have also proven the fact that sunlight play an important role in production of melatonin and serotonin, which are both are responsible for mood disorder in winter.

### What Are The Symptoms Of Seasonal Affective Disorder ?

1. Feeling of sadness, anxiety, grumpy mood.
2. Decreased interest in daily activities and feeling tired.
3. A craving to eat more carbohydrates and gain weight.
4. Have trouble sleeping and concentrating.
5. During winter months especially during holidays people miss their dear ones, have financial pressures and different stresses of life predispose further to depressions. Some genetic factors such as family history of depression, low thyroid levels, and anti-hypertensive medications furthermore contribute to depression.

#### Treatment Of Seasonal Affective Disorder

- 1 Light therapy, counseling with a psychologist, exercise, and life style changes such as yoga, regular exercise, and good eating habits all help with this disorder.
- 2 People who are treated for seasonal affective disorder in a timely way tend to recover well.
- 3 An attempt to prevent future episodes of depression depends upon using light therapy and psychological support on regular basis.
- 4 Holiday depressions anxiety and stress.
- 5 The stress, anxiety, unrealistic expectations, financial pressures, and excess commitments all contribute to anxiety, leading to depression during the holidays.
- 6 People feel depressed during winter holidays due to seasonal affective disorder due to lack sunshine exposure.
- 7 Holidays parties, drinking alcohols, over eating and lack of sleep also linked to anxiety and depressions.

#### Coping With Depression During Holidays.



1. Set up realistic goals and expectations , reach out to your friends, find inexpensive ways to enjoy yourself such as window shopping, and helping others in need all these are very rewarding and will make you happy.
2. A regular exposure to bright light, particularly fluorescent light at home, and raising the window curtains during day time, significantly improves depression in those suffering from SAD.
3. Anxiety is a feeling of apprehension and fear characterized by physical symptom of heart palpitation, sweating, irritability, and feelings.
4. Remember that life is full of ups and downs. How we react to life struggles plays an important role in overcoming our feelings of sadness. A positive attitude in life protects against depression.

**April showers bring May flowers. The Winter Blues are followed by Spring Joy!**