

Seasonal Affective Disorder DSM-5 Criteria

What is Seasonal Affective Disorder?

Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD), also known as Major Depressive Disorder with seasonal pattern in the DSM-5, is a subtype of depression related to mood changes that are linked to seasonal changes. The diagnostic specifier “with seasonal pattern” can describe a seasonal pattern of symptoms in both major depressive disorder and bipolar disorder.

The following criteria are used to diagnose Seasonal Affective Disorder according to the DSM-5:

DSM-5 Diagnostic Criteria

This specifier applies to the lifetime pattern of mood episodes. The essential feature is a regular seasonal pattern of at least 1 type of episode (i.e. -mania, hypomania, or depression).

The other types of episodes may not follow this pattern. For example, an individual may have seasonal manias, but his or her depressions do not regularly occur at a specific time of year.

1. There has been a regular temporal relationship between the onset of manic, hypomanic, or major depressive episodes and a particular time of the year (e.g. -in the fall or winter) in bipolar I or bipolar II disorder. Do not include cases in which there is an obvious effect of seasonally related psychosocial stressors (e.g. -regularly being unemployed every winter).
2. Full remissions (or a change from major depression to mania or hypomania or vice versa) also occur at a characteristic time of the year (e.g. -depression disappears in the spring).
3. In the last 2 years, the individual's manic, hypomanic, or major depressive episodes have demonstrated a temporal seasonal relationship, as defined above, and no non-seasonal episodes of that polarity have occurred during that 2-year period.
4. Seasonal manias, hypomanias, or depressions (as described above) substantially outnumber any nonseasonal manias, hypomanias, or depressions that may have occurred over the individual's lifetime.

Signs and Symptoms

1. Major depressive episodes that occur in a seasonal pattern are often characterized by prominent energy, hypersomnia, overeating, weight gain, and a craving for carbohydrates.
2. This specifier can be applied to the pattern of major depressive episodes in bipolar I disorder, bipolar II disorder, or major depressive disorder, recurrent.

Signs and Symptoms

3. The essential feature is the onset and remission of major depressive episodes at characteristic times of the year.
 - Typically the episodes begin in fall or winter and remit in the spring. Less commonly, there may be recurrent summer depressive episodes.
 - This pattern of onset and remission of episodes must have occurred during at least a 2-year period, without any nonseasonal episodes occurring during this period.
 - Finally, the seasonal depressive episodes must significantly outnumber any nonseasonal depressive episodes over the individual's lifetime.
4. The seasonal specifier also does not apply to those situations in which the pattern is better explained by seasonally linked psychosocial stressors (e.g. -seasonal unemployment or school schedule).

Additional Notes

I feel this every winter, too. But it helps to be able to talk through it with someone—yes, I'm a professional who also gets professional help! There's no shame in it, and I know just how to help you. My door is open!

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Note: This handout is for informational purposes only and should not be used for self-diagnosis. It is important to consult with a healthcare professional for proper diagnosis and treatment of any mental health condition.