

Seasonal Affective Disorder DSM-5 Criteria

I. What is seasonal affective disorder?

Seasonal affective disorder (SAD) is not classified as a standalone disorder in the DSM-5. Instead, it is recognized as a specifier that can be applied to bipolar and related disorders, and major depressive disorder, recurrent. This specifier, formally termed "with seasonal pattern," is used to describe cases where major depressive episodes occur in a predictable seasonal pattern, most commonly during fall and winter months.

The seasonal pattern specifier helps clinicians identify and diagnose individuals whose depressive episodes are consistently linked to specific times of the year, distinguishing these cases from depression that may coincidentally occur during certain seasons due to external psychosocial factors.

II. DSM-5 diagnostic criteria

With seasonal pattern: This specifier applies to the lifetime pattern of mood episodes.

The essential feature is a regular seasonal pattern of at least one 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 have depressions that do not regularly occur at a specific time of year.

A. 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.

Note: Do not include cases in which there is an obvious effect of seasonally related psychosocial stressors (e.g., regularly being unemployed every winter).

B. 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).

C. 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 nonseasonal episodes of that polarity have occurred during that 2-year period.

D. 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.

Note: The specifier "with seasonal pattern" can apply to the pattern of major depressive episodes in bipolar I and bipolar II disorder, to the pattern of manic episodes and hypomanic episodes in bipolar I disorder, and to the pattern of hypomanic episodes in bipolar II disorder. The essential feature is the onset and remission of major depressive, manic, or hypomanic episodes at characteristic times of the year.

In most cases, the seasonal major depressive episodes begin in fall or winter and remit in 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. In addition, the seasonal depressive, manic, or hypomanic episodes must substantially outnumber any nonseasonal depressive, manic, or hypomanic episodes over the individual's lifetime.

This specifier 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). It is unclear whether a seasonal pattern of major depressive episodes is more likely in recurrent major depressive disorder or in bipolar disorders. However, within the bipolar disorders group, a seasonal pattern of major depressive episodes appears to be more likely in bipolar II disorder than in bipolar I disorder. In some individuals, the onset of manic or hypomanic episodes may also be linked to a particular season, with peak seasonality of mania or hypomania from spring through summer.

The prevalence of winter-type seasonal pattern 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.

With seasonal pattern: This specifier applies to recurrent major depressive disorder.

A. There has been a regular temporal relationship between the onset of major depressive episodes in major depressive disorder and a particular time of the year (e.g., in the fall or winter).

Note: Do not include cases in which there is an obvious effect of seasonally related psychosocial stressors (e.g., regularly being unemployed every winter).

B. Full remissions also occur at a characteristic time of the year (e.g., depression disappears in the spring).

C. In the last 2 years, two major depressive episodes have occurred that demonstrate the temporal seasonal relationships defined above and no nonseasonal major depressive episodes have occurred during that same period.

D. Seasonal major depressive episodes (as described above) substantially outnumber the nonseasonal major depressive episodes that may have occurred over the individual's lifetime.

American Psychiatric Association. (2013). *Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders* (5th ed.). Pearson.