

Why your period symptoms might be worse in the winter

January 25 2024, by Jahnavi Daru, Ewelina Rogozinska and Varsha Jain



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Period symptoms are frustrating no matter the time of year. But those who menstruate might feel like certain symptoms are worse during the winter months, when the weather is gloomy, the days are short and cold

and flu seem to always be lurking. This phenomenon has even been dubbed "[winter period fatigue syndrome](#)".

Unfortunately, there's no evidence that such a thing as [winter period fatigue](#) syndrome exists. There's also no good evidence to suggest changes in the seasons can worsen period symptoms. But that doesn't mean there isn't a scientific explanation for why you might feel some of your [period](#) symptoms are worse during the colder months.

Symptoms such as fatigue, irritability, poor concentration and a weaker immune system, may in fact be pointing to the more obvious cause of [iron deficiency](#).

The body needs iron in order to function. Iron helps produce [red blood cells](#), which carry oxygen throughout the body. But many people don't get enough iron in their diet. In fact, iron deficiency is the [most common nutritional deficiency](#) in the world.

Alongside the symptoms that iron deficiency can cause, low iron can also lead to [anemia](#)—a fall in [red blood cell count](#). While the symptoms of [anemia](#) can be very similar to those caused by iron deficiency (including fatigue, tiredness, and cold hands and feet), symptoms can be more severe, too—leading to heart palpitations, shortness of breath and even loss of consciousness.

Menstruation is a leading cause of both iron deficiency and [anemia](#). People with [heavy or prolonged periods](#) are particularly at risk as they regularly lose more blood each month than their body can replace. Some studies even estimate that in women who experience heavy periods, 90% are iron deficient and [60% are anemic](#).

Those who normally have heavy periods might not realize that this could actually be the cause of their fatigue, irritability and difficulty

concentrating. This is because so many who have heavy periods just [assume their blood loss is normal](#). But left unchecked, heavy periods can leave women and people who menstruate trapped in a vicious cycle of progressive [blood loss](#) and iron loss, leading to anemia, which can be difficult to break.

And even though [many clinical guidelines](#) for managing heavy menstrual bleeding recognize the importance of treating iron deficiency and anemia caused by excessive blood loss, these conditions are still [often missed](#)—despite how treatable they are.

Winter symptoms

Many of the symptoms of iron deficiency and anemia overlap with other health conditions. This is why it's important to talk to your doctor as soon as symptoms start to make sure you're getting the right treatment.

For example, fatigue, lethargy and changes in mood can also be symptoms of [seasonal affective disorder](#). This is a type of depression that affects some people only in the autumn and winter.

So if you find your symptoms began when the shorter days and colder weather arrived, then exercise, self-care (such as resting if you need to and getting plenty of sleep each night) and eating a [balanced diet](#) that contains plenty of fiber, complex carbs and protein [may help somewhat](#). Your GP may also recommend talking therapy.

But if you find you have such symptoms all year round—and suffer from heavy or prolonged periods—this may be a sign you have iron deficiency. Certain symptoms of iron deficiency may also seem worse during the winter months.

Since [iron deficiency](#) affects how well your immune system functions,

this could explain why you may feel you suffer from more seasonal illnesses during the colder weather. This will require a trip to the GP to be diagnosed, as well as taking an [iron](#) replacement if your doctor recommends it. This should significantly improve your quality of life and symptoms.

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