

# Somatic Symptom Disorder (SSD)

Somatic Symptom Disorder (SSD) is a mental health condition. People with SSD have a lot of discomfort and problems with day-to-day activities from their physical symptoms. SSD affects about 5 to 7 percent of people in the United States, and mostly affects women. About 30 to 60 percent of people with SSD also have anxiety or depression.

## Symptoms

Physical symptoms are different for every person, and may include:

- Chronic (long term) pain
- Feeling very tired and weak (Fatigue)
- Stomach (gastrointestinal) problems
- Nausea (feel like throwing up)
- Dizziness or headaches
- Breathing difficulties or chest pain
- Heart palpitations (feelings of having a fast-beating, fluttering or pounding heart).

**A person with SSD also has a lot of thoughts, feelings, or behaviors related to the physical symptoms. For example:**

- Great concern or worry about physical symptoms
- Belief that others do not take their symptoms very seriously
- Spending a lot of time and energy on health concerns

It is important to know that people with SSD are not making things up and their physical symptoms are not all in their head.

## Causes of SSD

**The cause of SSD is believed to be from a number of things, including:**

- Genetics (passed on at birth)
- Personality traits (a person's pattern of thoughts, feelings, and behaviors)
- Make up and working of brain
- Life experiences, such as trauma or illness

## Treatment Often Involves Therapy and Medication

- **Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT)** has been an effective form of therapy for SSD. It helps patients recognize and change negative thought patterns that may be causing their symptoms.
- **Medications that may be prescribed for SSD include** anti-depressants, anti-anxiety medications, and pain relievers. These medications can help lessen symptoms of anxiety and depression and lessen pain and discomfort.

## Caring for Yourself

People with SSD may find it helpful to know the signs of stress and how it affects their body. Stress management and relaxation methods (mindfulness and progressive muscle relaxation) may also help with symptoms.