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Tips to Combat Seasonal Affective Disorder

More than the Winter Blues

Charleston, SC, December 12, 2013 — Seasonal Affective Disorder, also known as SAD, is more than just the winter blues. It is a type of depression that occurs during one season, typically the winter months, and goes away during the rest of the year.

“When daylight hours start to decrease at the end of summer, people who are more sensitive to the seasonal time change may start to experience symptoms as soon as late August or early September,” Dr. Jeannine Monnier, South Carolina Psychological Association (SCPA) President-Elect said. “Others may not develop symptoms until November or December.”

Many people experience some sadness or restlessness during the winter season, especially those at higher latitudes where winter days can be very short. Although some may meet the criteria for SAD or another clinical depressive condition, others may just be experiencing what is commonly known as the winter blues. The winter blues is not a clinical diagnosis, but simply normal feelings of sadness.

Symptoms of SAD are the same as those of depression. They can vary in severity and often interfere with personal relationships. Symptoms include fatigue, pervasively sad mood, loss of interest, sleep difficulty or excessive sleeping, craving and eating more starches and sweets, weight gain, feelings of hopelessness or despair and thoughts of suicide.

APA and SCPA offer these tips to combat Seasonal Affective Disorder:

Experience as much daylight as possible. The lack of sun exposure is part of what causes SAD and soaking up as much as you can, can lessen your symptoms. Sit by a window or get out for a walk during daylight hours. You could even take up a winter sport to get you outside and keep you moving.

Eat healthy. Comfort foods don't have to be loaded with extra calories and lots of sugar and fat. Get creative and look for hearty, low-calorie recipes that are easy to prepare. Instead of eating cake and cookies, try making a dessert from seasonal fruits like apples and pears.

Spend time with your friends and family. Spending time with your friends and family is a great way to lift your spirits and avoid social isolation. Snuggle with your kids or pets; visit with your friends while drinking a hot cup of tea or play board games with your family. Friends and family can be good to talk to about how the season is affecting you.

Counteract the urge to isolate. Don't stay cooped up in your house all winter. Get out and enjoy your community this season. Volunteer, join a local club or go ice skating with your loved ones to start.

Seek professional help. If you continue to struggle with feelings of depression, you may want to seek help from a mental health professional, such as a psychologist. Research shows that psychotherapy is an effective treatment

for depression. A psychologist can help determine if someone has seasonal affective disorder and how best to treat it.

To learn more about depression and related mind/body health issues, visit www.apa.org/helpcenter and follow @APAHelpCenter on Twitter. To find out more about the South Carolina Psychological Association, visit www.scpsychology.com and follow us on Twitter at @SCPsychological.

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South Carolina Psychological Association is the only professional organization in South Carolina representing all areas of psychology: academic, practitioner, public service, and students. As a 501 (c)(6) professional association that represents the professionals of psychology in South Carolina, South Carolina Psychological Association has the purpose to advance psychology as a science, as a profession, and as a means of promoting human welfare; to foster and maintain high standards of practice, teaching, and research in the field of psychology; and to make available to the public information regarding psychology as a science and as a profession.

The American Psychological Association, in Washington, D.C., is the largest scientific and professional organization representing psychology in the United States. APA's membership includes more than 134,000 researchers, educators, clinicians, consultants and students. Through its divisions in 54 subfields of psychology and affiliations with 60 state, territorial and Canadian provincial associations, APA works to advance the creation, communication and application of psychological knowledge to benefit society and improve people's lives.