

UW Health: Developing a COVID-19 winter resilience toolkit is important for mental health

Posted on Tuesday, Oct 27, 2020

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Madison—Approximately 4-6 percent of the US population experience Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD), a type of depression that typically occurs during the winter months, and another 10-20 percent have a milder form of the condition. Cold weather and a lack of sunlight seem to be triggering factors for this condition, and Wisconsin will have no shortage of either one of these over the next six months. Between the start of daylight savings time this weekend, the colder temperatures, stress related to COVID-19 and even the political divisions facing our country at election season, people are more at risk than ever to experiencing SAD and the winter blues. But UW Health psychologist Shilagh Mirgain says that developing a COVID-19 winter resilience toolkit can help people stay happier and healthier this winter. The following are some important tools that Mirgain says we should develop as we enter these winter months:

- **Be active**- regular exercise has been shown to reduce depression and help prevent it.
- **Shift your focus**- instead of dwelling on your problems turn your perspective outside of yourself, such as do a kind act, help someone, express gratitude to others or feel awe for the world around you.
- **Stay connected**- connect with others in person or virtually.
- **Get outside**- spending time outdoors is always good for mental health.
- **Engage in self-care**- eat healthy foods, prioritize good sleep, and maintain a daily routine.
- **Vitamin D3**- in northern climates, like Wisconsin, the sun's rays are not strong enough to give us what we need. Talk with your doctor about supplements. The daily recommendation in the US is 1,000 international units. Mushrooms

and fish are also a natural source of vitamin D.

- **Light therapy**— consider using a light therapy box, which have been proven to be effective for certain individuals with SAD.
- **Call your doctor**— speak with your physician if you experience feelings of being down and have no interest in doing the things you used to enjoy, especially if these symptoms are disruptive or you are having thoughts of suicide.

Some of the most common symptoms of SAD include loss of interest or pleasure in things typically enjoyed; fatigue; concentration problems; sleep problems; weight gain; feelings of sluggishness or restlessness; irritability; sense of helplessness or hopelessness.

Shilagh Mirgain is available for Zoom interviews.