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Oklahoma HMO shares tips to help beat the winter blues

An estimated 10 million Americans impacted by seasonal affective disorder (SAD)

OKLAHOMA – While falls and hypothermia are two main concerns during the winter months, seniors are also at risk for a lesser-known health hazard — seasonal affective disorder (SAD). This disease is a form of depression that typically affects people during the winter months. GlobalHealth, an Oklahoma-based health insurance provider, is supplying information to help raise awareness of SAD and educate Oklahomans on recognizing and managing SAD this winter.

“It is normal to feel a bit blue during the darker winter months or after the holidays have passed, but when your sadness lasts more than a week or two, it could be a red flag,” said Dr. Wesley Williams, medical director at GlobalHealth. “SAD is thought to affect roughly 6% of the U.S. population, and most depressive episodes appear in the fall or winter and go away in the spring.”

GlobalHealth is providing information to help raise awareness of SAD.

What is seasonal affective disorder? SAD, which is sometimes called the “winter blues,” is a type of depression that begins and ends at about the same time each year. Those diagnosed with SAD usually have experienced major depression for the past two years during that specific season, which may be related to changes in the amount of daylight that person receives. The decline in daylight during the winter can affect circadian rhythms and cause hormonal changes that may lead to symptoms of depression in people with SAD.

What are the signs and symptoms? Those with SAD may experience feeling depressed most of the day (almost every day), having low energy, oversleeping, weight gain, changes in appetite or losing interest in activities they previously enjoyed. SAD is four times more common in women than in men and is more frequent in people who live farther north or south of the equator.

How can I fight off SAD? Remaining healthy and active this holiday season can help you prevent and manage seasonal depression. By exercising 30 to 60 minutes several days a week, you can boost serotonin and endorphins, as well as improve your sleep and boost your self-esteem. Eating fresh fruits and vegetables, along with small, well-balanced meals can also help

manage SAD. Opt for oatmeal, whole grain bread, brown rice and bananas over pasta and white bread. Some foods, such as flaxseeds, soybeans and walnuts can also help improve your mood.

What are the treatment options? There are several types of treatment for SAD, including medication, light therapy and psychotherapy. Selective Serotonin Reuptake Inhibitors (SSRIs) may be used to treat SAD, while light therapy can replace the diminished sunshine of the fall and winter months. Traditional cognitive behavioral therapy can also be effective for SAD. This type of psychotherapy identifies negative thoughts and replaces them with positive ones through behavioral activation. This helps SAD patients find engaging and pleasurable activities to improve coping with the winter months.

Those experiencing SAD symptoms should also talk to their primary care physician about the behavioral health services available to them. Some health plans, such as GlobalHealth, cover these services for their members, oftentimes with a \$0 co-pay for therapy sessions to encourage members to seek help without a barrier. Regular office therapy visits for both mental health or substance abuse are self-referral to in-network behavioral health practitioners for GlobalHealth members.

About GlobalHealth

GlobalHealth is changing health insurance in Oklahoma. As an industry leader, GlobalHealth is an Oklahoma-based health maintenance organization covering individuals in all 77 Oklahoma counties. Working proactively with its members, GlobalHealth engages a personalized management plan to address their specific needs and ensure the best possible health outcomes. GlobalHealth utilizes cutting-edge, predictive data technology as a foundation to deliver improved healthcare as part of its commitment to making health insurance more affordable. Its membership includes state, education and municipal employees, federal employees, and individuals who are eligible for Medicare. To learn more, visit www.GlobalHealth.com.

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