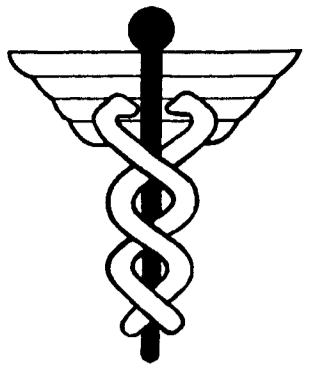


Healthy living

in college and for life



Winter blues in Erie

Students survive the season

by Ryan Anthony
staff writer

A rolling wave crashes in the crystal blue seashore as you change the station on your walkman. You reach up to remove your sunglasses so you can bask in the penetrating rays of the warm morning sunshine. Another wave crests and crashes upon itself. The sounds of the ocean blended with the soft breeze gently blowing across your face drown out the sound of your music as you drift into a late-morning nap. You subconsciously listen to the repetitive motion of the waves and the smile on your slumbering face widens. A dream drifts into your mind: nighttime falls as you continue to lie on the beach. The sky seems to be filled with millions of stars; millions of stars that fall from the sky and accumulate on the ground around you. You awake shivering, wondering where you are. "Wasn't I just at the beach?" you ask yourself. With a dazed look around your dorm room, you are slapped across the face with reality. Your wonderful dream just turned into a gloomy reality; welcome to dreary, harsh, Erie, Pennsylvania.

As we all know, winter ushers into Erie shorter periods of daylight along with cold, cloudy weather. This combination, when combined with an overwhelming workload, can lead to a miserable few months for many college students. Daydreaming becomes a part of our daily routines as we look for ways to make the lackluster weather seem a bit brighter. Daydreaming is an escape that works for some students, but not for all. For others, Erie winters create potentially major mental health problems.

Winter depression, also known as Seasonal Affective Disorder, is defined as a recurring pattern of depression that occurs during the winter months. These episodes

generally begin to materialize during October and November and persist until signs of spring appear around March or April. For many college students, winter depression causes an already tough semester to become even more cumbersome.

For many students at Behrend, it is nearly impossible to avoid at least a mild case of winter depression. We all know that once the sun disappears around October, chances are likely that you will not see it again until you reach your spring break destination. We learned in second grade science that the sun is essential to survival. Think of some fun outdoor activities, such as golfing, swimming, driving, and hiking. Sunlight goes hand-in-hand with nearly all of these. Granted, some require warm weather, but without sunlight, none are nearly as appealing. Without sunlight, life seems to slow down to a sluggish, unmotivated pace.

"I just get upset that I can't go do anything," commented Abby Ballew, a junior at Behrend. Many students find that the winter weather decreases their opportunities to go out and be active. They feel that because it is cold outside they cannot participate in athletic activities.

Decreased physical activity is just one of several symptoms of winter depression. Individuals diagnosed with winter depression commonly experience changes in sleeping patterns. They sleep for longer

periods of time and take more naps throughout the day. Apartment resident Jerod Bollord finds himself napping constantly throughout the

A final symptom found in people suffering from winter depression is general apathy and sadness, which are common in all types of

Studies have shown that changes in this light and dark pattern can alter our internal clocks. Reduced hours of daylight, therefore, are another

campus participate in a number of activities during Erie's long winters that they would not normally become active in during the rest of the year. Anyone who has been to the weight room recently can tell you that it has been more crowded recently than ever before. "Ever since we came back from Christmas vacation, it's been a madhouse down there," said student Fred Leyda. The fitness room in Ohio Hall is also being used in greater numbers.

Students with cars on campus have access to other remedies to beat the wintertime blues. Harborcreek Tanning Salon reports that from January to May is their busiest time of year. They believe that young people go tanning more in the winter in order to feel better about themselves. Exposure to tanning lights may be just what some students need in order to attack their winter depression.

Still others find additional ways to feel better about themselves in the winter. Many people like Behrend student Jeff Senita, have the "if you can't beat 'em, join 'em" mentality. They enjoy winter activities such as skiing and snowball fights. Thom Sargeant, an Almy Hall resident stated, "I sled ride in the winter. It's fun!"

There are always those people who enjoy the winter as well. "I don't get winter depression," said Leyda. "I love the snow." He is not alone in this feeling. Sophomore student Jen Kuntz also said she enjoys getting together outside with friends in the winter. "I like to look for the sun."

Whatever your take on winter, remember one thing. It lasts only a few months. If you suffer from winter depression, relax knowing it will be over almost as quickly as it came. If you are a snow-lover, make the most of it. The season doesn't last nearly long enough.



Karl Gressley wales a snowball at the unsuspecting professors that stress him out as they walk by.

PHOTO BY BECKY WEINDORF

school day. It is also difficult for students experiencing winter depression to get out of bed in the morning and get moving. Students who are normally "morning people" sometimes have trouble waking up and getting started on their day.

Another symptom of winter depression is an increased appetite accompanied by weight gain. This is due in part to a lack of physical exercise during the winter. Individuals may also become fatigued more quickly by physical activity during an episode of winter depression.

We all surely know someone who is a bit more irritable during the winter months. Not surprisingly, these apathetic attitudes usually disappear as spring and warmer weather approaches.

Winter depression is not caused totally by persistent cloudiness. Though winter depression is commonly thought of as a mental health disease, it is part physiological as well. Our bodies operate on an internal clock that allows us to have a daily rhythm of activities. This circadian rhythm is "set" by our environment's light and dark cycle.

reason we become depressed in the winter. Our circadian rhythm is thrown off, causing us to have altered moods.

It is not unusual for individuals suffering from winter depression to be treated with light therapy. Bright, artificial lights have been proven to be beneficial in helping the body resynchronize its internal clock. Brightness and exposure time to the lights must be carefully controlled, so see a physician for further assistance with this treatment.

So how do Behrend students cope with winter depression? Students on



Blood, Sweat, and Tears

Sarah Orr

health page editor

Everyone grab a

"raincoat" for Valentine's Day!

Jimmy caps, rubbers, trojans, or raincoats. It doesn't matter what name they go by, all that matters is that they are used. In reverence to National Condom Day, I have devoted an entire column to the observation of this holiday, which happens to coincide with another popular U.S. holiday, Valentine's Day on February 14.

The Center for Disease Control and Prevention has chosen the theme this year of, "Love Me Safely." According to the CDC, an estimated 12 million United States citizens will contract sexually transmitted diseases this year. Two-thirds of the newly reported STD cases occur in individuals under age twenty-five.

Condoms have a rich and varied past. Some evidence has shown that the first condoms were used by Roman soldiers as they used sheep

intestines as their sheath. Others believe that the condom's true birthplace was in Japan, as the Japanese used thin leather and tortoise shells to fashion condoms. Still others think that the ancient Egyptians gave birth to this form of contraceptive, but no one can say for sure.

One can see where the use of condoms just may come in handy. Condoms come in various sizes, textures, colors, and even flavors. Condoms are also sold with spermicide, Nonoxynl 9, which is especially recommended for those engaged in sexual activity. One may find condoms made of latex or natural skin, which is lamb skin. The problem with the skin condom is that it is a natural membrane with tiny pores that may allow a microscopic virus to pass through. Condoms may come lubricated

with either a silicone substance or a water based lubricant, or one may prefer the non-lubricated kind.

The use of condoms during intercourse, of course, greatly reduces the risk of contracting STDs such as chlamydia, gonorrhea, syphilis, and AIDs. Spermicides are effective and work by killing sperm and certain microorganisms, which can lead to some sexually transmitted diseases. In addition to the prevention of STDs, condoms are also helpful for preventing unwanted pregnancies. Combined with spermicide, condoms are usually 98% effective.

Of course, the only fool-proof method for preventing pregnancy and the transmission of a sexual disease is abstinence. But, let's get real. This is a college campus, and national statistics show that over

50 percent of all college students are sexually active. Penn State reports that over 7,000 new STD cases are diagnosed each year. This statistic is alarming because for some the diseases are potentially deadly.

Condoms are designed for use during anal, oral, or sexual intercourse. However, they are not a panacea for all diseases. Some infections, such as genital warts and herpes can still be spread from partner to partner through genital-to-genital, oral or anal contact, even with the use of a condom.

Many STDs have no immediate symptoms. Some may be treated with antibiotics or other medication. Some STDs have no cure. Four million people in the United States alone will be struck with an STD some time this year, and one in three sexually active youngsters will contract an STD by the age of 24.

So this Valentine's Day, make sure you protect the one you love. Remember to wear a raincoat because the weather can be a little stormy. Good luck and have a Happy Condom Day!

Healthy Happenings

Sex Jeopardy, Tuesday, January 30, at 7:00p.m. in OhioHall

Safer Sex Cabaret, Thursday, February 8 at 7:00 p.m. in Reed Commons

Healthy Relationships Week, February 12, sponsored by Health and Wellness, and information will be passed out about safe sex as well as condoms

Free Giveaway for the entire month of February

Peer Educators will be passing out items for women outside of Bruno's Monday-Thursday 4-6 p.m. and Friday 1-2 p.m.

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