

# Democrat & Chronicle

## LIFESTYLE

# Seasonal depression and anxiety: mental health tips as Rochester changes seasons



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Amid the presidential election, Rochester's long winter months, and the ongoing pressures of daily life, many are reflecting on their mental health.

So, what can you do to fight back against seasonal depression?

“Photo walks and being able to walk to a lot of places that I would usually drive to,” said Richard Colon, a downtown Rochester art curator.

According to Duygu Balan, a licensed psychotherapist and author of *Confidently Chill: An Anxiety Workbook for New Adults*, in recent years, the mental health landscape has undergone profound shifts, with anxiety disorders emerging as one of the biggest challenges.

“The surge in anxiety has been particularly pronounced since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic,” Balan said. “With life becoming increasingly uncertain and stressors piling on—from health concerns to economic instability—many individuals have found themselves grappling with heightened levels of anxiety. This disorder, once more compartmentalized to specific triggers, has now pervaded everyday life, making it difficult for many to manage routine stressors. Anxiety has nearly tripled in the general population, and its impact reverberates across all aspects of modern life.”

One challenge society faces is decreasing the stigma surrounding mental health, Balan said.

A key strategy is promoting open conversations about mental health in both private and public spaces. Friends, families, and communities should be encouraged to normalize seeking help and discussing emotional well-being.

Locally, New York State Senator Samra Brouk announced she is seeking applicants for her second annual Youth Mental Health Advisory Board.

The Youth Mental Health Advisory Board is open to Monroe County high school students ages 16 and older who are interested in mental health and policy. The board will meet between November and February to offer input on legislation designed to meet the mental health needs of younger New Yorkers.

One factor affecting this generation's mental health is the way we engage with social media and technology.

Balan said reducing screen time and social media use is crucial in today's digitally dominated environment, especially considering the harmful effects excessive use can have on mental health and well-being.

However, social media can also help spread awareness and lead to positive outcomes for those dealing with mental health issues.

"The use of technology, and a rise in secure online platforms, has led to a greater number of people having access to a therapist online," said Dr. Monica Vermani, one of Canada's highest-rated clinical psychologists.

"What's more, a number of business models now offer online therapy at reasonable costs to many people who would not otherwise have the resources or time to work with a therapist. This, to me, is a very positive development. Knowledge gives people the awareness, power — and, in a sense, permission — to take charge and seek help."

Help comes in many forms.

"Being outside and touching grass as much as possible helps me endure tough times," said Courtney Klee from 490 Farmers. "Keeping things alive—my houseplants, backyard garden, tending to my community plot."

Dr. Vermani shared some professional tips for those who need to refresh their minds:

**Cognitive Behavioral Therapy:** A structured, goal-oriented therapy where patients identify and challenge negative thoughts to facilitate positive changes in attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors.

**Behavioral Therapy:** Focuses on changing harmful behaviors by reinforcing healthy actions to improve quality of life.

**Dialectical Behavior Therapy:** Combines acceptance and change strategies, emphasizing emotional regulation, mindfulness, and coping skills for healthier relationships and stress management.

**Psychodynamic Therapy:** In-depth talk therapy exploring unconscious thoughts, memories, and emotions to understand behavior and relationships.

**Emotionally Focused Therapy:** Examines emotions and behaviors in relationships, helping participants develop healthier interpersonal dynamics.

**Mindfulness Meditation:** A practice of staying present and accepting thoughts and feelings without judgment.

**Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction:** Uses mindfulness techniques to manage stress, letting go of self-judgment and slowing racing thoughts.

**Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy:** Combines mindfulness with cognitive therapy to manage mood and emotions in a group setting.

**Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing:** A therapy for trauma that uses bilateral stimulation to reduce distress from traumatic memories and reframe negative beliefs.

“If you or someone you know is in crisis, go as quickly as possible to the closest hospital,” Dr. Vermani said. “Share your feelings, thoughts, moods, and any physical symptoms. Try to be as transparent and as honest as you can.”

Applications for Senator Samra Brouk’s Youth Mental Health Advisory Board are due online by Monday, Oct. 21.

**More:** 'Daniel's Law' passes NY Senate mental health committee

*Genae Shields is the business and development impact reporter. As a member of the local community, Genae enjoys learning about newly emerging businesses and changes that impact Rochester's BIPOC and LGBTQ neighborhoods. She also enjoys supporting local artists and nonprofit organizations. Contact Genae at [gshields@gannett.com](mailto:gshields@gannett.com).*