

# Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD), Depression, and Communication/Relationship Problems in Deaf People

National Institute for the Deaf

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# Overview

- Seasonal Affective Disorder
- Depression
- Communication and Relationship Problems
  - How common are these problems in deaf people?
  - What might be causing some of these problems in deaf people?
  - What can you and we do to help reduce these problems in deaf people?

# Seasonal Affective Disorder

- “Winter Blues”
- Occurs when there is less sun
- Same as depression
- Goes away when warmer weather returns



# Summer SAD

- Less common than Winter SAD
- As hot weather approaches, those with summer SAD:
  - Eat less
  - Sleep less
  - Lose weight
  - Extremely irritable and agitated

# Prevalence of SAD

- Affects millions of adults and children
- Varies with latitude
  - With more rigorous diagnosis, approximately 2-4% of population of Canada and 1-2% of US population, depending on geography.
- On average, an additional 10% suffer from subsyndromal SAD ("winter blues").
- Women 2-4 times as likely as men to have SAD, depending on study.

# Core Symptoms of SAD

- Increased sleep (70-90% of SAD patients)
- Increased appetite (70-80%)
- Unacceptable weight gain (70-90%)
- Carbohydrate craving (80-90%)

# Other Symptoms of SAD


- Fatigue/inability to carry out normal routine
- Feelings of misery, guilt, low self-esteem, despair, apathy
- Irritability
- Avoidance of social contacts ("hibernation" syndrome)
- Increased susceptibility to stress
- Decreased interest in physical contact
- Slow, sluggish, lethargic movements
- In some: mood swings and periods of hypomania in spring & autumn

# What is Depression?

- Feeling sad or hopeless for weeks at a time
- Feelings of guilt
- Feeling negative about yourself
- Not interested in fun stuff
- Avoiding friends and family



# Depressed?

- Yes- if feeling sad or depressed for most of the time
  - No- if only sad for a short time (e.g. a friend died)
  - Common Symptoms of Depression
    - Can't sleep
    - Not interested in fun stuff
    - Feel inferior or worthless
    - Tired all the time
    - Can't concentrate
    - Eating a lot more or a lot less
    - Feeling sluggish or weak
    - Suicidal thoughts
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# Poor Mental Health Care Access

- ~2% of deaf individuals in need of mental health care received the appropriate care (Vernon, 1983)
- Causes of poor access:
  - Language barriers limit access for deaf
  - Mistrust in mental health community
  - Few mental health staff specializing in deaf care

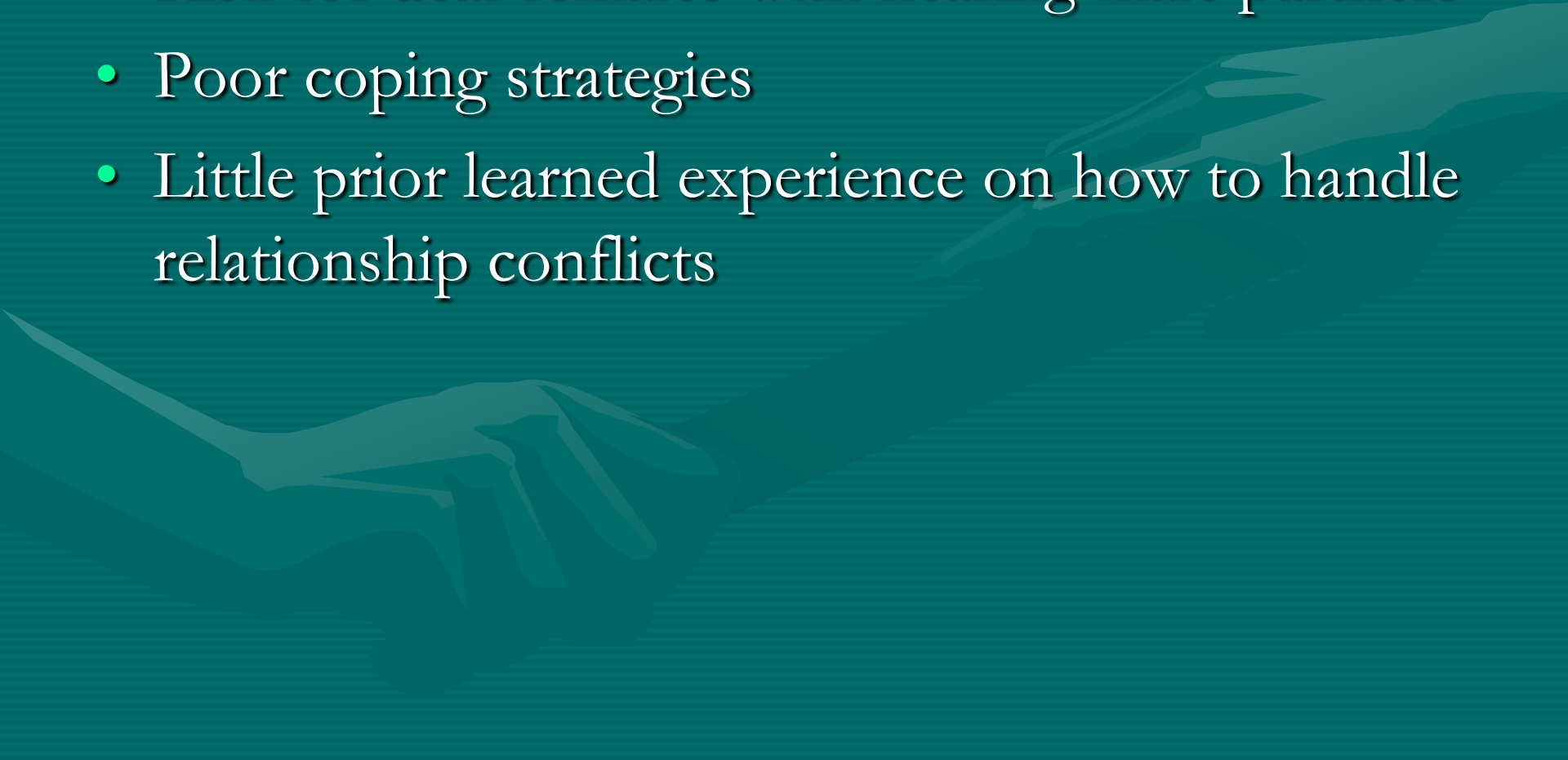
# Depression and Anxiety

- DHoH have higher rates of depression and anxiety when compared to hearing peers (Kvam et al., 2006)
  - Norwegian postal surveys → Deaf Register versus hearing respondents to Nord-Trondelag Health Study
  - Below are those who responded quite a bit or extremely to 3 of the questions in the survey- a) fearful; b) hopeless; c) blue

	Deaf	Hearing
Fearful	10%	1%
Hopeless	21%	4%
Blue	20%	2%

# Communication/Relationship Problems in Deaf People

- Risk for deaf females with hearing male partners
- Poor coping strategies
- Little prior learned experience on how to handle relationship conflicts



# Suicides in Deaf People

- There is suggestive evidence that there is increased risk of suicide among deaf individuals
  - Deaf and hard of hearing women had significantly increased odds of suicide attempts compared with females (Samar & O'Hearn- in press)
  - Suicide attempt rates among deaf school and college students in the previous year varied from 1.7% to 18% (Turner, 2006)
  - Higher rates of suicidal attempts and gestures among deaf students at deaf only education programs (2.2% vs 0.9% of those mainstreamed) (Critchfield et al., 1987)

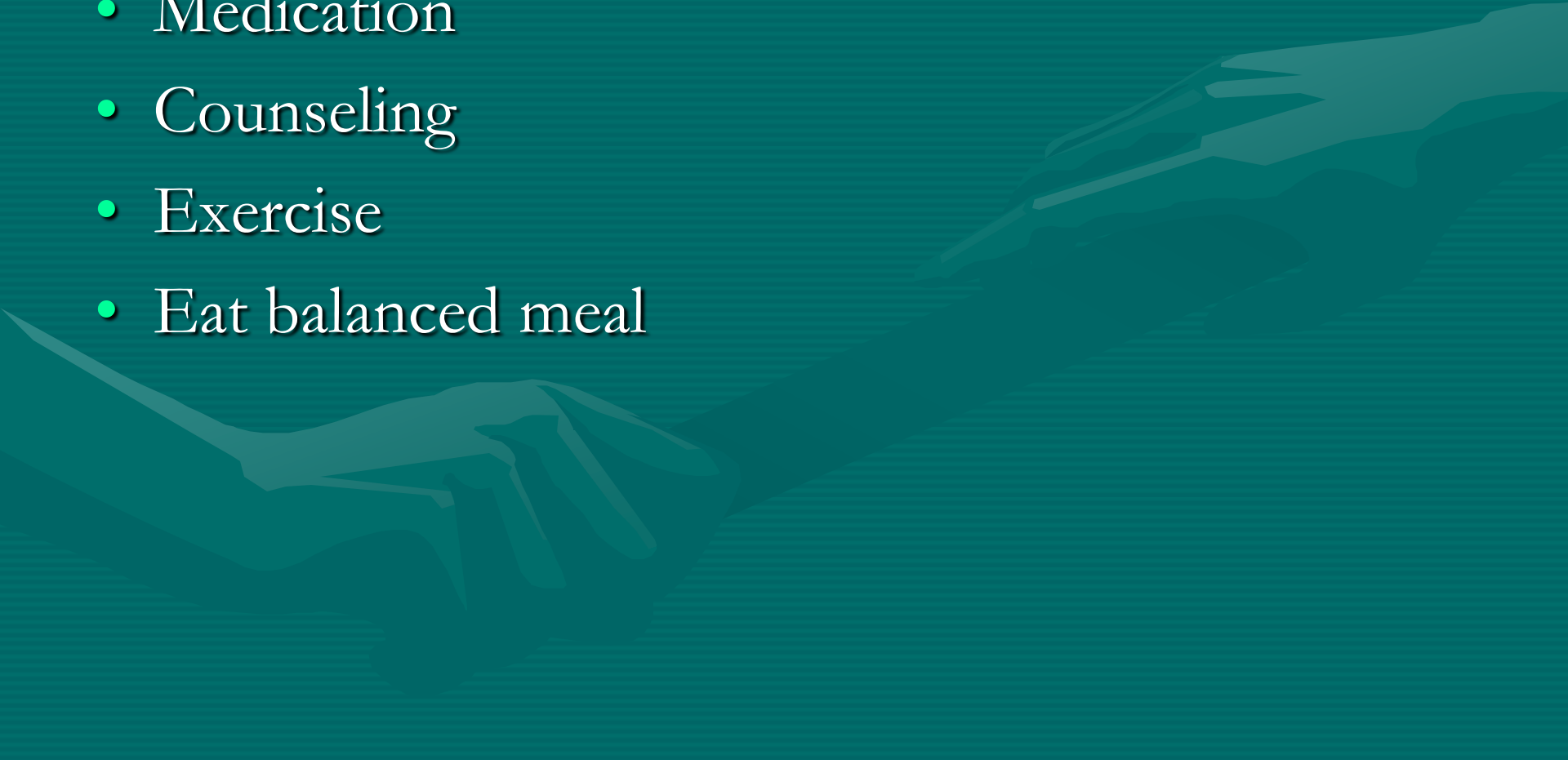
# Prevention of SAD

- People who have had repeated seasonal depression should talk to a mental health care professional about prevention methods. Starting treatment during the fall or early winter, before the symptoms of SAD begin, may be helpful.



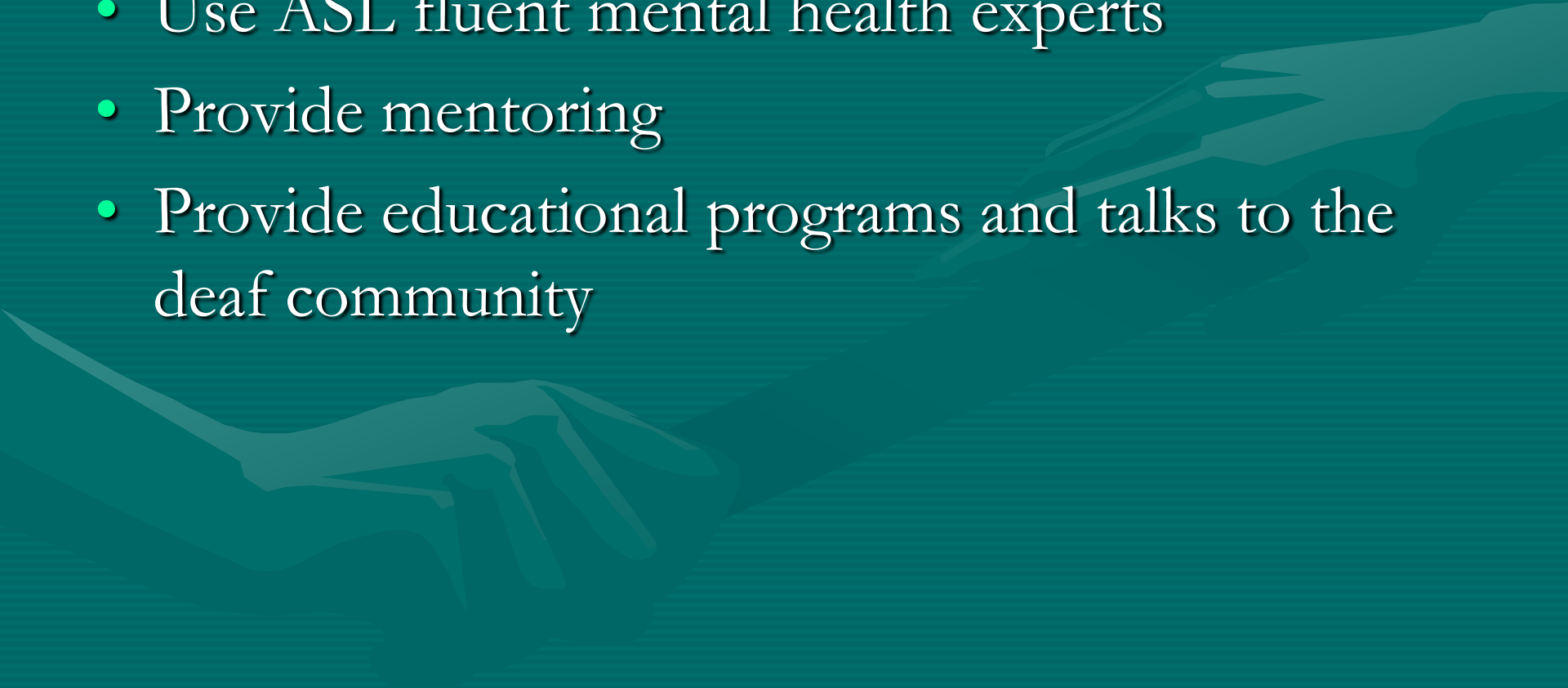
# Treatment for SAD

- Light therapy
- Medication
- Counseling
- Exercise
- Eat balanced meal



# Strategies to Reduce Depression in Deaf People

- Ongoing interventional programs
- Use ASL fluent mental health experts
- Provide mentoring
- Provide educational programs and talks to the deaf community



# Strategies to Reduce Communication and Relationship Problems

- Provide educational programs and talks on healthy relationships
- Encourage family members to sign even in private discussions
- Provide deaf mentors and deaf coaches

# What You Can Do to Prevent SAD and Depression

- Exercise (body makes endorphins)
- Sunlight or light boxes (helpful for the “winter blues”)
- Healthy diet
  - Fish (omega 3 fatty acids)
  - Vegetables and fruits
  - Whole grains
  - Plenty of water

# Get Counseling If You Need Help!!

- RIT's counseling center offers counseling in American Sign Language
- Deaf Wellness Center at University of Rochester Medical Center also offers counseling in American Sign Language

# Questions?

- Thank you for coming!

