

How the end of football season can trigger withdrawal symptoms

February 3 2015, by Anne Dillon

When the football season ends with the final play of Sunday's Super Bowl, some fans may begin to feel withdrawal symptoms.

It's similar to quitting smoking, explained Loyola University Medical Center psychiatrist Angelos Halaris, MD, PhD: When a person engages in a pleasurable activity, such as watching a [football game](#), a neurotransmitter ([brain chemical](#)) called dopamine is released in a part of the brain called the [nucleus accumbens](#). When the pleasurable activity ends, the person is left with a feeling of deprivation.

"When the football season is over and there's no other game on the schedule for months, you're stuck, so you go through withdrawal," Dr. Halaris said.

For hardcore fans, the feeling can be similar to post-holiday blues, Dr. Halaris said.

Dr. Halaris offers these tips for fans who suddenly have to face months without football:

- Don't go cold turkey. Watch football on YouTube, or on recordings, in gradually diminishing amounts.
- Share your feelings of withdrawal and letdown with a friend or spouse.
- While it can be unpleasant, football withdrawal is not serious enough to require antidepressants or other medications. And do

not self-medicate with drugs or alcohol.

- Most important, buck up. "You're just going to have to basically tough it out until football starts up again," Dr. Halaris said.

Dr. Halaris is a professor in the Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences and medical director of Adult Psychiatry at Loyola University Chicago Stritch School of Medicine.

Provided by Loyola University Health System

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