

the
mind out loud
voice

EDITION 1

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Happy MOLidays

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mindoutloud.org

 @molstudents

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Message From the Authors

This edition marks the beginning of the work from the 2023-2024 Publications Committee. This year we aim to inform readers about youth mental health through our editions in hope of increasing mental health awareness. We would like to apply our own unique perspectives through the use of various mediums such as infographics, personal stories, poems and so much more. By using our voice we are able to highlight the most prominent issues faced by youth today and encourage action in curbing mental health stigma.

In this introductory edition we go in depth about the holiday season as it relates to mental health. From dealing with holiday stress to filling the season with joy and positivity, our first edition debriefs it all. We look forward to creating the amazing content we have in store and hope our readers will enjoy it just as much as we do.

"Seasonal Affective Disorder"

By Mio Khuyag

This information has been gathered and compiled by students, not mental health experts. Any individual struggling with their mental health deserves to have care from a mental health professional or a medical doctor. If you or a friend are struggling, please reach out to a trusted adult to get the care you need.

What is Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD)?

Seasonal affective disorder, otherwise known as SAD or seasonal depression, is a type of depression that only happens during certain times of the year. Most often people who have SAD experience it during fall or winter, and it mainly goes away by the time it hits spring or summer. This pattern is classified as winter-pattern SAD or winter depression. Sometimes people experience this in the summer as well, though it is less common.

What causes SAD?

Researchers, though still looking to determine a cause, believe that SAD (specifically winter-pattern SAD) may be triggered from a lack of sunlight. It's suggested that sunlight affects brain chemicals that cause feelings of happiness, joy, and contentment. When there is a limit on sunlight being received in the body, that can lead to less of those feelings. Vitamin D deficiency in the winter months may also have the same effect on serotonin levels.

For summer-pattern SAD, a few contributors may be changes in schedules as well, with summer breaks or finding work or other causes, a drastic shift in schedule can disrupt sleep, eating, and/or work habits.

What are some symptoms of SAD (all symptoms found on NIMH)?

As SAD is a type of depression, most symptoms align with depression (major depressive disorder). Not every person with SAD experiences all the symptoms down below. This information is not meant to diagnose or treat a mental health condition. **Please talk with a mental health professional if you are experiencing any of these symptoms.**

- Persistent feelings of sadness or “emptiness”
- Feelings of irritability, frustration, pessimism, anxiety, hopelessness, guilt, worthlessness, or helplessness
- Loss of interest in activities
- Fatigue or decreased energy
- Difficulty concentrating, remembering, or making decisions
- Changes in sleep and appetite
- Physical aches or pains, headaches, cramps, or digestive problems that do not have a clear physical cause and do not go away with treatment
- Changes in sleeping or eating patterns

Anyone experiencing these symptoms may also be experiencing a serious form of depression or other mental health concerns. If you or a loved one is struggling, please reach out to a trusted adult to get linked with a medical or mental health professional. Some additional symptoms are more specific to SAD and its two types.

For winter-pattern SAD:

- Oversleeping
- Overeating
- Social withdrawal

For summer-pattern SAD:

- Trouble sleeping
- Poor appetite, leading to weight loss
- Restlessness and agitation
- Anxiety

SAD in the MOL Community:

Below are some stories from Mind Out Loud Student Representatives and other students, consisting of those who have experienced seasonal depression, or know someone who does. If you experience seasonal depression, know that you are not alone! Reach out to a trusted adult or mental health professional.

“I do suffer from really bad seasonal depression at times, especially around finals and the holidays. It usually ends up making me feel really depressed and affects my self-esteem. School is one thing that tends to stress me out, just because the environment is super competitive and I feel like I can't keep up or that I'm not good enough. At times, it's because of the seasonal depression, and it can make it really hard to look forward to things or avoid getting burned out.”

“I've experienced SAD both in the Winter and Summer in the past. Because it occurs due to seasonal factors it can be very difficult to overcome since many circumstances are out of your control like sunlight but I've definitely learned how to manage it better.”

“My SAD makes it difficult to regulate my emotions when summertime comes around - I get super irritable and depressed. It can get especially difficult when I don't have much to do over the summer because I don't have any schoolwork to motivate me out of my SAD.”

Tips:

It's easy to lose motivation when seasonal depression comes around, but it's important to remember that activity always helps reduce the symptoms of seasonal depression.

Accumulated here are some exercises or tips that Mind Out Loud wanted to share that may help with coping with seasonal depression!

- *Exposure to sunlight:* This could be opening your blinds when it's daytime or taking a walk outside in the sun - anything to get yourself to be exposed to more sunlight.
- *Do the activities you enjoy:* Talking with friends, cooking food, watching some TV, exercise, playing a game, or other activities that you enjoy may help bring you more comfort in dealing with SAD. Any mood boosting activity like journaling or meditation practices may help as well.
- *Try to avoid naps in the daytime and/or staying in the dark:* Avoiding the time where the sun is out can be disorienting and possibly worsen SAD symptoms.
- *Plan some days to look forward to:* In the fall/winter seasons, especially paired with school or work, it can be really easy to feel unmotivated and depressed. Or in the summer, with the lack of school, it can be easy to find yourself alone on the summer break. Planning some fun days with friends, family, or with yourself can make the season feel more meaningful!

Sources:

- <https://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/health/conditions-and-diseases/seasonal-affective-disorder#:~:text=Seasonal%20affective%20disorder%2C%20or%20SAD,antidepressants%20can%20help%20treat%20SAD.>
- <https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/publications/seasonal-affective-disorder#:~:text=In%20most%20cases%2C%20SAD%20symptoms,pattern%20SAD%20or%20winter%20depression.>
- <https://www.webmd.com/depression/summer-depression>

"Childhood Nostalgia"

By Mary Mora

There's a certain magic that blankets our homes when the holiday season finally rolls around—a magic that is intricately woven with the threads of childhood nostalgia. The day after thanksgiving—that's when, in my mind, the holiday festivities can officially begin. At midnight, we bring out the Christmas tree, decorate the house, and turn on the lights for the first time. Every single time, it brings me back. Every room that I visit in my house triggers a different memory. The smells wafting from the kitchen trigger a sanctuary of scents, reminding me of a time filled with laughter, joy, and warmth. I remember running around my living room in my Christmas pj's, on Christmas morning, each presents a new bundle of joy.

Walking outside, seeing each Christmas light, overwhelms me with memories of driving around and placing my hands on the windows, excited for each new decorated house we passed. But it's not just the tangible elements that define the holiday nostalgia. It's the intangible moments - eagerly awaiting Santa Claus, the smell of cinnamon candles, fresh baked cookies, unforgettable traditions, Christmas lights, handmade ornaments you once thought were masterpieces, the thrill up hastily unwrapping presents, laughter, peace, joy. Every twinkle of Christmas lights and flicker of candle flames gives off a sense of continuity, reminding us that our childhood selves are still with us, everywhere we go, eagerly celebrating the beautiful season too. The memories come back one after another and capture the beauty and essence of the holiday season. I raise a glass and toast to the enchanting and timeless memories that the holidays bring us.

Featured: MOL's holiday traditions, the beauty of childhood

"We celebrate Diwali, which was a few days ago (November 12th). My mom always makes amazing Indian sweets, and we get together with family and friends to celebrate"

"Hanukkah! We get gifts, eat chocolate/donuts/potato pancakes, light candles, and play with a dreidel."

"As a child, I loved getting gifts and seeing what Santa got me. Now, I love being able to spend time with my friends and getting a break from school, as well as getting and giving gifts to friends."

"As a child, I would love receiving chocolate chip cookies from my neighbors during christmas, and eating pumpkin cheesecake during thanksgiving."

"...gifts, music, weather, costumes, sentimentality becomes the norm during the holidays, toy trains that my grandpa used to set up"

"From decorating the Christmas tree to making snowflakes in elementary school, there was such an innocent feeling of happiness"

Tribute to the beauty of MOL's holidays! We wish you all a very merry holiday season

Baking During the Holidays

Baking is a great way to de-stress and get in the spirit of the holiday season! It's also a great way to bond with friends and family while getting to taste amazing desserts. Here is a great recipe to share with your loved ones:

M&M's Pudding Cookies

Ingredients:

- 2 1/2 cups all-purpose flour
- 1 1/2 teaspoons baking soda
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 1 cup butter, softened
- 3/4 cup granulated sugar
- 3/4 cup packed brown sugar
- 1 box (4-serving size) Jell-O® vanilla instant pudding and pie filling mix
- 2 eggs
- 1 teaspoon vanilla
- 2 cups green and red M&M's® milk chocolate candies
- 1 cup white vanilla baking chips

Steps:

1. Heat oven to 350°F. In medium bowl, mix flour, baking soda and salt; set aside.

2. In large bowl, beat butter, granulated sugar and brown sugar with electric mixer on medium speed about 1 minute or until fluffy; scrape side of bowl. Beat in dry pudding mix. Beat in eggs, one at a time, just until smooth. Beat in vanilla. On low speed, gradually beat flour mixture into butter mixture until well blended. Stir in chocolate candies and white chips until blended.

3. Drop dough by rounded tablespoonfuls about 2 inches apart onto ungreased cookie sheets.

4. Bake 9 to 11 minutes or until light brown. Cool 2 minutes; remove from cookie sheets to cooling rack. Cool completely, about 15 minutes. Store in airtight container at room temperature.

Try customizing the cookie to different holidays by using different colors and candies

**"There is hope,
even when your
brain tells you
there isn't."
— John Green**

"Surviving Finals Season"

By Alexa Southall

With just a few weeks left in the semester, many students are itching to get to winter break. While the holiday season can't seem to come quick enough, finals seem to be approaching all too quickly. Finals season might feel like a nightmare to study for and you're not alone. Below are some tips from Mind Out Loud Student Reps on how they prepare for finals season:

1. Start Early

Finals will be a lot less stressful when you don't have the pressure of cramming a lot of information at once. Not procrastinating is easier said than done, but sitting down and making a study calendar can be really helpful in making sure you have enough time to cover the material of multiple subjects without burning out.

2. Take Things One Step At a Time

It can be very overwhelming to review a semester's worth of material for multiple subjects. At times, it may be so daunting that you don't even know where to start. You can start to overcome this feeling by breaking up your studying into small action steps like watching a video or reviewing a lesson. You can also create a study schedule for when you want to study different topics. Start with the hardest subjects for you and slowly work through the material that is most confusing. That way, you can stay focused on what is most important in your understanding while tackling one topic at a time.

3. You Don't Have to Study Alone

Set up times to study with friends or classmates.

This can provide motivation to be productive or a great space to ask questions about things you are confused about. If group studying isn't for you, try going to a local coffee shop or library. Sometimes just being outside of your normal environment and around other people can make you more productive. Don't hesitate to reach out to teachers or tutors about the questions you have; sometimes the questions we think are trivial, are the greatest barriers in our understanding.

4. Find What Works for You

Studying is not one size fits all. Everyone has a different way of absorbing and retaining information so try different things and see what helps you. Here are some ideas:

- Review class lessons + notes
- Watch videos
- Use practice problems
- Draw out visuals on a whiteboard
- Create flashcards
- Practice active recall to test memory
- Teach the subject to others to check for understanding

Finals can be a difficult time to get through. It is easy to feel burnt out and lose motivation to keep studying. That is why it is so important to take care of yourself as you push through these last few weeks. We asked the Mind Out Loud Student Reps for some of their favorite ways to practice self-care and here are some of their responses:

- Take deep breaths
- Get good rest
- Take a bath
- Go on a walk or workout
- Hang out with people you love
- Find things to look forward to after finals
- Make time for yourself to relax + do things you love

Most of all, remember that your grades do not define you. Know that regardless of your scores, you tried your best and your hard work will pay off in the long run. During this time show yourself some compassion and love, and be proud of all that you have accomplished this far. Best of luck!

Navigating Grief During the Holiday Season

The holiday season is typically portrayed as exciting, happy and nostalgic. However, we recognize that for those coping with grief, loss, or tragedy, this time of the year can be very challenging and difficult to get through. We extend our support to those experiencing such misfortune during this holiday season through these resources provided.

Resources:

<https://health.choc.org/coping-with-grief-during-the-holidays/>

In this article, a CHOC expert offers tips for coping with grief during the holidays.

<https://www.texaschildrens.org/blog/grief-and-loss-midst-holiday-cheer-how-support-bereaved-children-during-%E2%80%9Cseason-joy%E2%80%9D>

This article provides suggestions for how parents, caregivers, or family members can help and provide support for children to cope during the holiday season.

Interested In Becoming A Student Supporter?

What is a Student Supporter?

Mind Out Loud Student Supporters is a group of middle and high school students (13+ years old) who work toward raising mental health awareness, supporting MOL, educating peers about suicide prevention, and advocating for the mental health and wellness of students.

Why should I be a Student Supporter?

Student Supporters enjoy benefits such as volunteer hours, priority acceptance into the Student Rep program, and the flexibility of attending meetings as they fit your schedule.

How can I become a Student Supporter?

Visit mindoutloud.org/getinvolved to apply!

**THANK YOU
FOR READING!**



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