Staying Happy and Healthy in the Winter

AeroAstro dREFS
Discussion

- Have you experienced a cold, dark winter before?
- What are you looking forward to this winter?
- What don’t you like about winter?
Boston Winters are Cold and Sometimes Snowy

● It’s important to dress appropriately for the weather!
  ○ Boots, gloves, hats, waterproof outer shell, etc.
● Limit your cold exposure -- if it’s below 15 F/-10 C, dress very warmly and spend as little time outside as possible
  ○ This typically only happens a few days each year
● MIT Outing Club hosts Winter School during IAP
  ○ Winter School teaches strategies for safe outdoor recreation in winter (how to keep your water from freezing, how to dress warmly, etc.)
Boston Winters are Dark

- Sunrise is between 6 and 7 am, and sunset is between 4 and 5 pm
  - Winter solstice has about 9 hours of daylight
- Sunlight exposure is important for your circadian rhythm and Vitamin D levels
- Vitamin D supplements can be very helpful
- Waking up earlier allows you to make the most of limited daylight hours
  - Just because we change the clock doesn’t mean you have to change your wakeup time
- Try to get sunlight on your face as soon as you wake up!
Discussion

- Do you have any strategies for getting enough sunlight in the winter?
- How do you dress on cold days?
- Do you feel visible to cars when you walk or bike in the dark? Why/why not?
What is Seasonal Affective Disorder?

- Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD) is a medical condition with depression-like symptoms which is triggered by the darkness of winter.
- Common symptoms:
  - Irritability
  - Fatigue/loss of energy
  - Feelings of worthlessness
  - Inability to concentrate
- Think you might have SAD? Talk to a medical professional!
  - [MIT Student Mental Health & Counseling](https://mitsmhc@mit.edu)
Common Treatments for SAD

- Therapy
- Medication
- Sun lamp/light box
  - Note that sun lamps are not well-regulated by the FDA and there are many fakes
  - Before buying a sun lamp, consult a medical provider to make sure you buy the correct lamp and use the lamp correctly
  - Typically you want >= 30 min of light therapy right after waking up
- Maximizing exposure to natural sunlight can be helpful
- Vitamin D supplements can be helpful
Winter Self-Care

● “Self-care” has sort of become a buzzword, but it’s important to care for yourself by:
  ○ Dressing warmly/appropriately for the weather
  ○ Staying safe/visible when walking and biking at night
  ○ Getting as much natural sunlight as possible
  ○ Engaging in fun winter or year-round activities
  ○ Supplementing Vitamin D if needed
  ○ Seeking professional help for SAD if needed

● Self-care is NOT treatment for SAD -- seek professional help if needed
Discussion

- Name one thing you do for self-care *in general*
- Name one thing you plan to do for self-care *this winter*
- Do you have any seasonal summer hobbies? How can you adapt or replace those for the winter?
Fun Winter Events & Activities

- Holidays
- [MIT Mystery Hunt](#)
- [Winter School](#)
- [IAP in general](#)
- Winter sports
  - Skiing/snowboarding
  - Ice skating
  - Snowshoeing/winter hiking
Discussion

- What is the most fun thing you’ve done during previous IAPs (if you’re not a first year)?
- Do you have any favorite winter holidays or winter activities?
- What is your favorite year-round hobby/activity?