

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](#)

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?