

# TEEN TALK



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A QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER FROM THE BOSTON CHILDREN'S HOSPITAL LEAGUE'S RESOURCE CENTER

## Could it be SAD? — By Oliver, age 17

When the days are cold, overcast, and shorter, it can affect our mood. Often referred to as the “winter blues,” SAD (seasonal affective disorder) can affect anyone, anywhere; however it is four times more common among women, and those who live in cold climates, far from the equator. Young adults and teens are more apt to have symptoms of SAD than older adults as well as people who have a personal or family history of depression.



The exact cause of SAD is unknown; however, medical professionals hypothesize that it occurs due to lack of sunlight or a change in a person's natural sleep cycle. Researchers are studying other factors that may play a key role such as lack of Vitamin D, too much of the hormone “melatonin”, and problems regulating serotonin, an important neurotransmitter that regulates mood.

Symptoms of SAD can often manifest in ways similar to depression:

- having little energy
- having trouble sleeping and/or sleeping longer, yet never feeling rested
- having trouble staying focused
- changes in appetite and/weight
- withdrawing from usual social activities
- feeling hopeless

According to the National Institute of Mental Health, the symptoms of Winter Pattern SAD include: excessive sleepiness, low energy, overeating, withdrawal from social activities and cravings for carbohydrates. On the other hand, Summer seasonal affective disorder includes symptoms such as: decreased appetite with possible weight loss, trouble sleeping, restlessness, and anxiety. Any of these symptoms can make it hard to perform normal, daily activities such as going to school or work, and participating in sports or other activities.

The most common treatments for SAD are light therapy, counseling/therapy, Vitamin D and medication. This is difficult especially for those living in areas where it is too dark and cold to go outside and/or those who work/go to school during the sunlight hours. However, any time outside in the sun is helpful, even if it's just a short walk during a lunch break. If you can't exercise outside, indoor exercise can still be helpful.

SAD can be challenging to diagnose because a person has to have seasonal symptoms for at least two years. Thus, if you think you might have SAD, talk to your health care provider and keep a log of your symptoms. The good news is there is treatment that is very helpful. If you or someone you are close to is suffering from symptoms of SAD, it's best to talk with a health care provider so you can get help.



**Boston Children's Hospital**  
Center for Young Women's Health

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# Better Safe Than Sorry

— By Kiana, age 17

When consuming food, we often forget to think about the risk of acquiring a food-borne illness. But what about being mindful about how you prepare food too? Avoiding the transmission of foodborne illness is an important part of keeping yourself and others healthy.

Most of us know that it's important to wash our hands frequently when handling food but there are other things that are equally important such as making sure to cook fish, seafood, meat, poultry and eggs to a minimum internal temperature to ensure that harmful bacteria will be killed. Here are some key points to remember. For more detailed information on Food Safety, read our complete guide: <http://youngwomenshealth.org/2016/09/26/food-safety/>

- Check the expiration date of items before you prepare a meal.
- Don't cook or prepare food if you are sick.
- Use separate cutting boards for raw meat and produce then wash the cutting boards with soap and water and dry before storing.
- Wash fruits and veggies (with cold running water) to remove possible pesticides or bacteria just before cooking or eating.
- Store all food at the appropriate refrigerator/freezer temperature to ensure it continues to be fresh and safe to eat (less than 40° F).
- Use an ice pack to keep your school lunch cool or store in a refrigerator until you are ready to eat it.



# Spread Kindness, Not Germs

— By Ayatt, age 17

Washing your hands is the easiest and best way to prevent yourself from becoming sick. Every day you touch things that many other people could have touched. You never know whether or not somebody sneezed into their hand and then wiped their sneeze infected hand on the stair railing or the faucets that you touched. That's why you should keep your hands away from your face. Germs are everywhere and they have the potential to make you sick. But did you know that you have the power to get rid of these germs by simply washing your hands and not touching your face? You can use the following tips to make sure you are washing your hands correctly:



1. Sing the "Happy Birthday" song twice while washing your hands, in order to make sure you are doing it for 20 seconds.
2. Use clean warm water! Too cold or too hot will force you to rush and not wash your hands long enough.
3. It's always better to wash your hands with soap and water, but if you can't, hand sanitizer can also do the trick.

## The Center for Disease Control recommends that you wash your hands BEFORE:

- during, and after handling or preparing food
- eating food
- caring for someone who is sick
- touching a cut or wound

For more information: <https://www.cdc.gov/handwashing/when-how-handwashing.html>

## You should also wash your hands AFTER:

- caring for someone who is sick
- using the toilet
- changing diapers or helping to clean a child who has used the toilet
- blowing your nose, coughing, or sneezing
- touching an animal, animal feed, or animal waste
- handling pet food or pet treats
- touching garbage

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