

# Mental Notes

A Monthly Newsletter

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## SAD: Seasonal Affective Disorder



by Melinda Wilks, MFT Intern

Have you ever felt sad during the winter holidays? When it gets dark outside, do you feel dark inside? As the hours of daylight decrease, do you find your interest in being around others decreasing, too? If you've experienced any of these "symptoms," you may be surprised to learn there might just be more to your experience than a simple case of the winter blues.

Perhaps you've heard of Seasonal Affective Disorder, or S.A.D., but may not know exactly what it is. Perhaps you've experienced some of its symptoms and not realized there's a name for what you're experiencing.



S.A.D. is characterized by depressed feelings that recur during—and coincide with—the winter months. During that time, there is a decrease in the hours of daylight, which may lead to, or exacerbate, depressive symptoms. These depressive symptoms may include decreased sexual interest, lethargy, hopelessness, suicidal thoughts, lack of interest in normal activities, and social

withdrawal. Symptoms to SAD also include oversleeping, daytime fatigue, craving carbohydrates, and weight gain.

Some people who suffer from SAD may find relief from light therapy, which is a treatment involving a few hours of exposure to intense light. For others, they may benefit from just spending a few hours outdoors during daylight. If you are experiencing severe depressive symptoms, however, you may benefit from consulting with a therapist or psychiatrist.

There are many options for treatment, and SAD can be managed.

If the holidays make you stressed or a little sad, here are some small things you can do to feel some big changes emotionally:

**Volunteer.** Helping others brings out the best in us and helps us to feel good about what we are doing.

**Go window shopping or look at holiday decorations.** During the hustle and bustle of the season, we are so intent on buying. Try to enjoy the experience!

**Limit your drinking.** Drinking can exacerbate depressive symptoms.

**Spend time with people who support you.** Whoever they are, they love you and can help you get through the holidays.

**Find time for yourself.** All the stress of visiting others can wear on you. Make sure to schedule some time for you so that you can enjoy the holidays as well.

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**Relaxation Session**  
**Thurs. Dec. 6 2:00-3:00 PM**  
**Kirschman Hall 301**

\*For disability related accommodations, please contact Adrian Péré at 280-6683.

## Home for the Holidays?

by Dot Fransson, MSW Intern

Holidays should be fun and carefree, right? Well, the stress of buying presents, seeing the family, and traveling can often be anything but a vacation. Here are some ideas on how to get through the holidays with as much cheer as possible!

1. **Set aside relaxation time:** Whether time alone or with a close friend, a walk in the park or 30 minutes reading, make sure you have some time to do what you want.
2. **Plan ahead:** Need three dozen cookies for a party on Saturday and gifts for a family gift exchange on Monday? Make sure you're ready in advance by scheduling time for baking, shopping, etc. That will make it easier to fit in those last minute events and surprises.
3. **Budget:** The holidays can wreck havoc with your budget. Can you do things that cost less but mean just as much? How about an IOU for yard work, help cleaning, or a trip to the (free) sculpture garden? Can you get a group of friends to try a book exchange or white elephant party instead of exchanging expensive new presents?
4. **Get over Perfectionism:** Yes, we want everything to be just perfect, but that is not realistic or possible. Focus on being in the moment and enjoying time with friends and family rather than tying the perfect bow and icing the perfect cookie.
5. **Prioritize:** Make sure you know what's most important to you this holiday season and focus on that. It's OK to say no in order to keep your own sanity!! P.S. Each person has his/her own idea of what sits at the top of the list. You can't please everyone.
6. **Take care of yourself:** Holidays are stressful, do your best to stick to your exercise and sleep routines. It's OK to indulge in all the wonderful food- that's often a mainstay of holiday traditions, but you don't want to go overboard and regret it later.