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Seasonal Affective Disorder: How to Recognize It

With temperatures cooling and days getting shorter, some people may begin to show signs of seasonal affective disorder. SAD is a type of depression related to seasonal changes that typically occurs during fall and winter months. The mood disorder is more common in women and younger people, and with those who live in places with long winter nights, experts say. Symptoms include feelings of hopelessness, reduced energy and focus, social withdrawal, increased sleep, loss of interest in work or other activities, sluggish movements, increased appetite with weight gain, and unhappiness and irritability. The National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) says symptoms can last four to five months. Treatments for SAD include light therapy using 10,000 lux light boxes, medications, vitamin D and psychotherapy. The Cleveland Clinic also recommends that people who suffer from the disorder eat a well balanced diet, exercise, see friends and spend more time outdoors. The NIMH suggest that those with winter pattern-SAD should start treatment before the fall to help prevent or reduce the disorder's effects. However, the organization added, existing studies have found "no convincing evidence that starting light therapy or psychotherapy ahead of the fall could prevent the onset of depression." Millions of American adults may suffer from SAD, although many may not be aware they have the condition. The Cleveland Clinic says around 5% of adults in the U.S. experience SAD and about 10% to 20% of people in America may get a milder form of the winter blues. SAD is more common in those with major depressive disorder or bipolar disorder, and people with SAD tend to have other mental disorders as well. In addition, the NIMH points out that SAD sometimes runs in families. Scientist do not fully understand what causes SAD, though research suggest that sufferers may have reduced activity of the brain chemical serotonin. Others produce too much melatonin, or may have lower vitamin D levels. In addition, the manner in which sunlight controls the levels of molecules that help maintain normal serotonin levels appears not to function properly in people with the disorder. The use of alcohol or drugs could worsen symptoms,

experts warn. People who believe they may be suffering from SAD are encouraged to talk to a health care provider or mental health specialist about their concerns. Health care providers may diagnose someone with SAD if there are symptoms of major depression, depressive episodes occurring during a specific season, or more frequently during a specific season than the rest of the year. **Source: Julia Musto, Fox News Health, October 2, 2021, 12:54pm EDT.**

Matters of the (Young) Heart

Aiden insists on sitting by Sophia, and won't let anyone else play with her. He told her he wants to fly her to Paris. When he draws pictures of them together, he draws one person. "We are one, he says. "He's obsessed," says his teacher, Susie Siegel, a kindergarten teacher who has observed kinder crushes for the past 20 years. One recent student drew a picture of her five best friends and herself — three boys three girls — and declared that they're all getting married. "Even at this age, they're very possessive," Siegel explains — but profoundly genuine, which is why she constantly hears her kindergartners telling each other they "love" them. So what's a parent to do when their young child declares that she and Jackson are getting hitched? How serious must we be about every cupid's arrow that grazes our child's heart? Some experts suggest parents not feed the flames with added drama. Julia Whitt, an experienced kindergarten teacher, sees kids develop crushes regularly. She lets her students know that it's great that they love each other, but that there's no dating in kindergarten. To further, and clearly, temper



the passion she adds: “And we don’t kiss at school either.” Others suggest that parents take advantage of young love to help develop kids’ social and emotional skills. “Children do form attachments early on to people they find like-minded,” says Marissa Gehley, a retired elementary school teacher and middle school counselor. “Those early, very simple connections, impact how we form relationships later on.” So take the opportunity to help your child start to articulate deeper thoughts and feelings. Ask, “Why is Emma so special?” and “What do you like about her?” When affections go unrequited, ask your child what they like about their crush, says Gehley, then ask what other children have those same qualities. “They begin to make connections,” she says. “It builds skills by looking for what we like, not for what we don’t like.” Talking to your child about their friend choices early can pave the way for conversations about romantic feelings later on. Gehley recommends approaching the conversation with a certain equanimity: “You don’t want to close doors with, ‘You’re too young, don’t be silly,’ because kids take these things hard. But you don’t want to go over the top with over exuberance, ‘Tell me everything!’ either.” Does all this change once adolescence hits? Yes and no. When hormones kick in, crushes can become all-consuming. “Few students actually have ‘relationships’ at this age, [but] most kids have crushes,” explains Sue Porter, a school counselor and sexuality educator. “Being in a relationship is generally viewed by peers as a positive and enviable thing... at the very least, it’s attention grabbing.” Porter says that how kids display their attractions depends a lot on the school culture and on the individual child. Some kids may be happy just having someone to text with, but, she warns, “Nothing takes the place of physical contact — and that’s certainly the goal, especially for boys.” For this reason experts stress that it’s crucial for parents to discuss feelings and appropriate behavior with their tweens. The experience for your child may have changed since their first kindergarten crush, but parents should focus on the same goal: keep lines of communication open. Still, the same conversation starters may not work. Porter cautions against bombarding your tween with a slew of questions. “This strategy works with young kids,” she says, “but parents need to adapt their parenting style as their children enter adolescence.” Back off a little, kids are likely to come to you, she says. When they do, steer clear of, “When I was your age ...” stories. In the face of unrequited love or heartbreak, parents should remain sympathetic, but not overly emotional. Letting kids have their feelings, mirroring their sentiments, and even trying to redirect them are all strategies that can work, says Porter, as long as parents don’t deny their child’s experience or belittle them. What doesn’t work, she says, is trying to “fix” it or rationalize the problem away. Something to the tune of, “I’m sorry you’re feeling sad, honey. It sounds like this is really hard for you,” is likely to work — though your adolescent’s reaction may be pointed, irritated, or dismissive. Help guide your child

towards the future: Who else is your child’s friend at school? Who else can your child sit next to at lunch? “You’re helping them work through the next steps,” Gehley says. “It’s a passage that we want kids to become familiar with...and try to normalize it a little bit.” Through all the pain, aim to stay positive. “‘Well, I never liked that girl,’ or ‘It doesn’t matter, you’re only 12,’” are unhelpful sentiments, Porter says, because they don’t address the fact that your child feels awful. Long gone are the days when mom and dad could eavesdrop on kid’s phone calls. “Now, it’s on 58 texts,” Gehley says. And with shorter messages, context gets dropped and miscommunication proliferates. In these cases, says Gehley, it’s crucial that parents help kids identify what was said — and what’s gone unsaid. “Answers are shortened to yes, no, and happy or sad faces,” Gehley says. “So it’s more important than ever to ask [your child] questions that require a little critical thinking to answer.” Thanks to digital tools, when things go wrong, they go wrong for the whole world to watch. “There can be complete devastation there,” Gehley says, recommending that parent help kids learn to “act a little” and put on a brave face. Guiding your child toward positive public reactions is crucial, Gehley says. In the digital world, this means keeping Facebook posts, texts, and tweets positive. This may not be easy, especially because privacy is anathema to this generation. If your child is very angry and inclined to lash out over social media, have him write it on a piece of paper — then shred the paper. In the long run, a friendship may be salvaged, and your child’s online presence remains positive.

Source: Jessica Kelmon, Director of Content for GreatSchools.org

<https://www.greatschools.org/gk/author/jkelmon/>

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Delving Into Devices - Children and Screen Time

“Screen time” used to mean sitting around and watching TV. For kids, too much time in front of the TV is linked to obesity, as well as trouble in school. But screen time doesn’t refer just to television anymore. Smartphones, tablets, and other handheld devices are now everywhere. These new screens pose new challenges for parents, says Dr. Jenny Radesky, a pediatrician at the University of Michigan. “There’s so much content available now on something a child can carry from room to room,” she explains. Almost all this new technology was designed for adults, not children, Radesky says. For example, a recent study by her team analyzed ads on YouTube channels marketed to kids. They found that more than half featured some age inappropriate ads, such as those for violent video games. Parents may find it hard to know how much time their kids really spend on handheld devices. Another study from Radesky’s team found that young children who had their own tablets used them

almost two hours a day. But only about a third of their parents accurately guessed that amount. Researchers are exploring how this type of media use affects kids' developing brains. They're interested in whether the use of phones and tablets alters the brain's executive functioning, Radesky explains. That's the ability to focus on important tasks, resist distractions, and use self-control. "Devices like tablets give you lots of stuff that's really exciting, all at once, with no waiting," Radesky says. Researchers want to know: Does that get in the way of kids doing harder tasks that help them build life skills? Studies have already shown that too much media use can affect other aspects of kids' health, including mental health and physical activity. "And sleep is a major one," adds Radesky. "A lot of studies have shown that the more kids use media, especially around bedtime, the worse their sleep is." But some uses of handheld devices can have benefits. Kids can use video chat to talk with relatives who live far away. Some educational apps and programs designed especially for children can help them in school. So how can parents find a balance? "There are ways to set some limits about how much time they can spend on devices," Radesky says. You can set timers. Some apps let you stop content from continuing to play automatically. It can be hard for parents to track what their children are doing on portable screens. But adults can model thinking critically about what they see when watching TV or other media with their kids. You can talk about what you like and don't like about a show or ad. You can point out when and why you think something is false or misleading. This can help kids learn these skills and use them on their own. "From an early age, make it a norm that you can talk about what's on devices," says Radesky. "You want kids to come to you if they see something creepy, or if they're just confused, because they know you can help them understand it."

Setting Screen Time Boundaries:

- Set a good example.
- Be a role model and limit your own screen time.
- Create a house rule that limits screen time and enforce it.
- Don't allow screens during meals or homework.
- Give your kids alternatives to screen time.
- Suggest playing outside, finding a new hobby, or learning a sport.
- Do other activities together, such as family board games, puzzles, or going for a walk.
- Don't put a TV or computer in your child's bedroom or let them go to bed with a portable device.

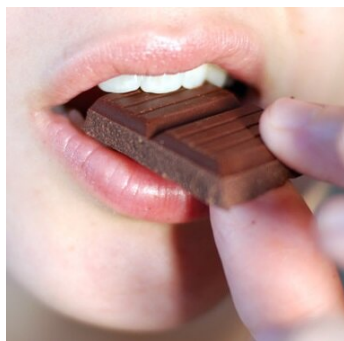
Source: NIH News in Health, A monthly newsletter from the National Institute of Health, part of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.
<https://newsinhealth.nih.gov/2022/02/delving-into-devices>

How Chocolate is Helping The Mental Health of Many

Just as physical health helps our body to stay strong and smart, mental health also helps our body to increase productivity and to control the stresses of life. Therefore, it is really important not to avoid mental and emotional issues as positive mental health not only provides a sense of contentment but also makes a person flexible enough to learn new skills, maintain perfect relationships, and be creative and enjoy life. In some societies people still believe that the only treatment option available for mental health problems is a medication with a huge list of adverse effects, however, various steps can nurture our mental health including, a healthy diet, getting enough sleep, and getting physically active. Healthy snacks like nuts and chocolate not only improve mood or concentration but also helps in ADD treatment and therapies for other serious mental illnesses by improving brain functioning. Mentioned below is how chocolate can help in improving mental health.

Flavonoids in Chocolate- A recent review published in May 2017, researched the flavanols and its effect on the brain function. Flavonoids are plant nutrients that are found incorporated not only in chocolate but in many fruits and vegetables, red wine, and tea. Flavonoids are believed to possess anti-viral, anti-tumor, anti-inflammatory, anti-allergic, and antioxidant properties that help in improving memory by increasing the brain oxygen level and blood flow, ultimately increasing the electrical activity of the brain. According to a 2011 study, flavanols found in cocoa have a positive impact on the psychological processes and effectively prevent age-related cognitive dysfunction. **Chocolate Contains Neurotransmitters-** Chocolate can affect our body's nervous system in various ways, one of them is causing the release of neurotransmitters in the brain. Neurotransmitters assist in conveying signals between neurons. Chocolate helps in releasing various happy neurotransmitters in the brain such as endorphins, serotonin, and other opiates. They trigger certain emotions and effectively reduce stress and decrease pain, this is the reason why chocolate is known to be comfort food. Endorphins help in alleviating depression as they act as sedatives and provide a feeling of pleasure and happiness. Serotonin is also known as a happy chemical as it efficiently regulates mood and contributes to wellbeing, therefore, deficiency of serotonin leads to depression and other kinds of mental illnesses. It is thought to regulate the sleep cycles of the body as it is a precursor of melatonin. It further plays a role in balancing the appetite, cognitive functioning, anxiety, and emotions. Thus, serotonin is known as an anti-depressant. Another unique neurotransmitter found in chocolate is phenylethylamine also known as chocolate amphetamine that modulates the blood sugar levels as

well as blood pressure levels that lead to the feeling of alertness, awareness, and excitement. Phenylethylamine increases the pulse rate drastically therefore, it is also known as a love drug. It produces the feelings to when someone is in love, therefore, chocolate is shared as a symbol of commitment and love. **Feelings of Euphoria-** A study published in 2013, revealed that chocolate alters the mood and make a person more content and calm. Chocolate contains various psychoactive ingredients that act similarly as the cannabinoid that produces a feeling of euphoria. Anandamide is one of the unique compounds found in chocolate that generates the production of dopamine that leads to a feeling of elation. **Prevent Brain Damage-** The ingredients incorporated in chocolate assist in increasing the blood flow to the brain that ultimately results in better brain functioning like prolonged attention span, the capability of solving problems and performing various tasks, increased reaction time, and enhanced memory. These benefits help older people in controlling mental decline and managing their short-term memory. The brain needs around 20 percent of the oxygen taken up by the lungs. That explains the brain being vulnerable to radical damage. This damage occurs more at a cellular level inside the brain and causes aging of the brain cells, thus, eating chocolate can help in neutralizing the radical damage as it consists of antioxidant properties and helps in the proper functioning of the brain as well as boosting memory, learning, and feeling of euphoria.



Conclusion- It is quite interesting that a snack food like chocolate has such strong effects on the brain and the human body. Eating chocolate may not only makes a person elated and sane but also keeps the brain active and healthy. Therefore, there is a wide list of reasons why people should incorporate chocolate into their healthy snack diet to obtain its soothing yet euphoric effect.

Source: Seed & Bean Company
<https://seedandbean.co.uk/blogs/blog/how-chocolate-is-helping-the-mental-health-of-many>

Advance Your Self Awareness

Self-awareness—being in tune with your emotions—may sound fairly straightforward and simple. But people tend to overestimate their level of self-awareness. Of course, we're all deeply emotional beings. Even if you think you're in touch with your emotions—perhaps you're someone who cries or laughs easily—you may not recognize the full spectrum of all your feelings without digging a little deeper. Becoming more self-aware is one of the benefits of mindfulness—the practice of focusing on the here and now and accepting whatever arises in our awareness without judgment. For a practice that focuses specifically on emotions, try the following exercise:

- Sit quietly in a comfortable position and close your eyes.
- Bring to mind something a little sad, but not overwhelming.
- Notice where in your body you feel that sadness.
- Place one of your hands on that part of your body in a caring, soothing way.
- Repeat the above steps but substitute different emotions for sadness: fear, anger, joy.

Increasing your awareness of these bodily sensations is fundamental to becoming more emotionally intelligent. When we examine our emotions carefully, we see that they consist of a bodily sensation accompanied by a thought, an image, or both. The more clearly we can recognize emotions in our bodies, the more clearly we know when a feeling is arising within us. Sensations can serve as an "early warning signal" for problematic or negative emotions that you might not want to act on automatically. For instance, imagine your spouse or partner says something that upsets you in front of your close friends. Take a moment to feel the sensations of anger in your body, but don't react or say anything right away. Wait a few moments until you can think clearly before responding. Another helpful practice is to keep a journal, taking special care to write down how specific events or personal interactions you had during the day made you feel. Talking with trusted friends, family members, or a therapist can also help you explore your emotions. For more information on building your awareness and skills to boost communication and relationships, check out the Harvard Medical School guide: *Emotional Intelligence*.

Source: https://www.health.harvard.edu/promotions/harvard-health-publications/emotional-intelligence?utm_source=delivra&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=HB20220728-EmoIntel&utm_id=3924817&dlv-emuid=482d1fea-b3f3-41f7-aa27-4fc5224401c2&dlv-mlid=3924817

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