

## SECONDARY SCHOOL & COLLEGE NEWSLETTER

January 2024



Welcome to the January 2024 MHST newsletter!

This time of year can bring up lots of different things for us - both positive and negative. However you may be feeling, we hope you and your families were able to find time to relax over the winter break.

In this edition we'll be looking at low mood and how the winter months can impact this. We will explore some strategies we can use to support our wellbeing at this time, as well as thinking about New Years resolutions.

We are the Mental Health in Schools Team (MHST). We provide targeted support for anxiety, low mood and/or behavioural difficulties. In Secondary Schools we primarily provide 1:1 support with young people using evidenced-based interventions based on Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT). If you feel you (or your child or pupil) would benefit from support from our service, you can speak to your school who will discuss with you and send a referral into our service.

Contact us:

If you have any questions or queries for  
the Southampton MHST

Tel: 0300 1236689

Email: [SouthamptonMHST@Solent.nhs.uk](mailto:SouthamptonMHST@Solent.nhs.uk)



# LOW MOOD

## What is low mood and how it can affect us?

Low mood is when normal feelings like being sad, down, low, grumpy, or irritable are very intense, go on too long, or get in the way of everyday life. These feelings happen to everyone at some point, especially after a loss or disappointment. But with low mood these feelings of sadness just seem to go on and on and it's hard to see a way to feel happy again.

Low mood can effect the way we think, feel, and behave. For example...

### THOUGHTS

- Self critical thoughts of not being worth anything
- Thinking things can't change, are pointless, nothing is good enough
- Thinking others won't understand what you're going through
- Ruminating on negative thoughts



### FEELINGS

- Tired, sleeping a lot or not enough
  - Irritable, angry, or grumpy
  - Difficulty concentrating
  - Feeling sluggish or slow
- Feeling sad, worthless, or hopeless a lot of the time
  - Emotional numbness



### BEHAVIOURS

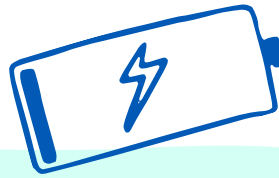
- Avoiding spending time with family and friends, spending lots of time alone
- Not doing the things I used to enjoy
- Hurting myself on purpose
- Missing school or not doing as well academically



Low mood can also impact our bodies on a biological level...

### APPETITE

Cortisol (our stress hormone) is released by the brain when we feel low – this might mean we don't feel hungry. Or, we might also comfort eat and eat more than usual.



### LOW ENERGY

Low mood drains our bodies of energy, making us feel tired and wiped out. This might mean we feel too tired to do the things we would usually want to do.

### ACHES & PAINS

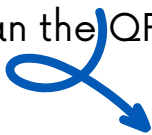
Low mood and pain share nerve pathways in the spinal cord and also share chemicals in the brain. This means we might feel aches and pains in our muscles.



Understanding your symptoms of low mood is the first step to getting better. Although these symptoms are upsetting, they are a **NORMAL** reaction and so often change without us needing professional support.

However, when the symptoms of low mood occur too much and get in the way of things you want and need to do, it is important to seek help and support.

Scan the QR codes below to find out more about low mood. Speak to your school or GP to access support services.



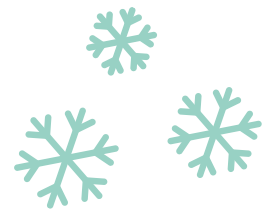
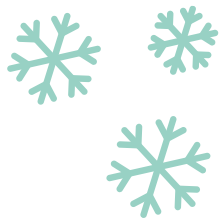
Young Minds



Stem4



ChildLine



# MOOD & WINTER

Some people find they are more likely to experience low mood in the winter months but there are things you can do to help yourself...

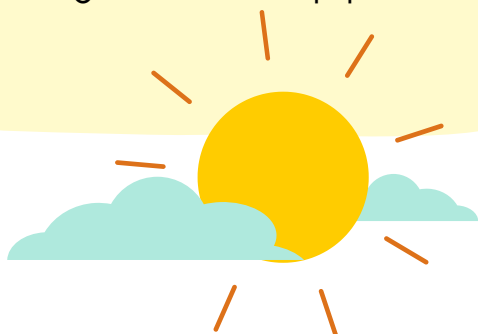
## Why does winter impact our mood?

As the days get shorter, the evenings colder, and the mornings frostier, many people begin to look forward to nights inside and the Christmas festivities. For others, the idea of darker days, cold weather and less time outside can be difficult. Many people find that the colder months leave them feeling sluggish, tired, and struggling to keep on top of mental wellness habits.

### SUNLIGHT

Whilst the clocks going back gives us an extra hour in bed, shorter and darker days may mean we have less Vitamin D, which we get from sunlight.

Vitamin D helps our bodies produce serotonin (the happy hormone) and melatonin (the sleep hormone). A dip in vitamin D can therefore mean we feel more sluggish, lower in mood and notice changes in our sleep patterns.



### EXERCISE

Regular exercise can improve people's mood, stress and anxiety. One reason for this is because exercising triggers the release of dopamine (the reward hormone) and endorphins (stress relief hormones) making us feel good. However, when it's dark and cold, and we feel tired or sluggish, we are less likely to want to go out for a walk or get up and exercise.



# What can we do to stay well in winter?



## 1 STAY ACTIVE

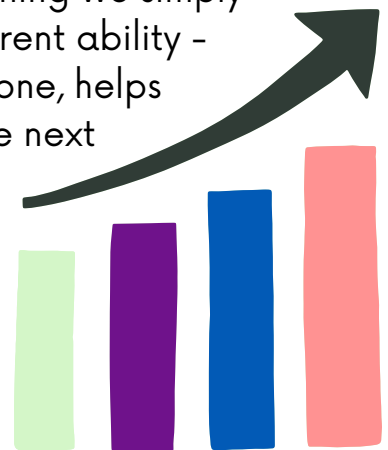
Exercise can relieve stress and improve mood as it changes the levels of certain chemicals/ hormones in your brain. Regular exercise can also help us to sleep better, which helps combat low mood and tiredness. Try and find a method of exercise you enjoy and can do in all weathers.

## 2 FIND THE LIGHT

The lack of daylight in winter can effect our mood, motivation, and sleep. Finding any opportunities for brightness throughout the day can help combat this. Try and get outside in natural light (even if it's not sunny) where possible and open up blinds and curtains during the day. These things can be particularly helpful in the mornings to help wake you up!

## 3 SET REALISTIC GOALS

Setting goals that are unachievable sets us up to fail - which only ever makes us feel worse. When we feel low in mood we can find things take more energy or effort than they normally do, meaning we simply cannot do as much. Set goals that match your current ability - you may find that achieving a goal, even a small one, helps give you the boost you need to do a little bit more next time. For more advice on setting goals see our feature on page 6!



## 4 MAKE A PLANNER

We are more likely to do things if we plan in how and when we are going to do them. Using a planner helps us keep track of what needs doing and helps us see whether we have a good balance of things on - we want to try and plan time for social connection, relaxation, work and exercise each week.



# NEW YEARS RESOLUTIONS

## Learn about setting helpful goals...

Come January lots of people like to set themselves a new year's resolution and often these involve big lifestyle changes, strict dietary restrictions, intense exercise regimes, and so on. While setting goals to try and improve our health and wellbeing isn't a bad thing, the pressure of unrealistic goals can cause a lot of stress and 'failure' to keep it up can lead to guilt, shame, anxiety, and low mood.

Evidence shows us that setting small, focused, achievable goals will actually lead to better results and support our mental health and wellbeing in the process. Use the tool below to help you set helpful goals:

**S** **Specific** - make it focused on one thing and be clear about exactly what you want to achieve and how you will do it

**M** **Measurable** - think about how you will track your progress and measure any results

**A** **Achievable** - make sure your goal is realistic with the time and energy you have - one step at a time

**R** **Relevant** - make sure your goal aligns with your values and long term goals, choose something that is important to you

**T** **Time-bound** - think about when you want to achieve this goal by and when you will review your progress





I am going to do 20 minutes of yoga, twice a week for 4 weeks and then review how I feel



I am going to add a portion of fruit to my breakfast at least 4 mornings week this month

I am going to put my phone away by 10pm every night for the next 2 weeks and monitor what time I get to sleep



It can also help to plan in when we are going to do the activities that will help us reach our goals. At the same time we can make sure we have a good balance of activities that support our mental wellbeing

	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thur	Fri	Sat	Sun
Morning						30 min walk in the park	
Afternoon	Swim practice			Help Mum cook dinner	Go to Tom's after school	Get homework done	Visiting Grandma
Evening		X-box with friends	Get homework done			Babysitting my sister - watch a movie	Get organised for school

Regular exercise is good for physical and mental health

Balance things we have to get done with things we want to do

Helping others makes them and us feel good

Include time for connecting with friends and family

Leave some time free for yourself too



# FURTHER INFORMATION & SUPPORT



The Mix is the UK's leading support service for young people. They are there to help you take on any challenge you're facing - from mental health to money, from homelessness to finding a job, from break-ups to drugs. Talk to them via our online community, on social, through the free, confidential helpline or the counselling service.



YoungMinds provide young people with tools to look after their mental health. They also aim to empower adults to be the best support they can be to the young people in their lives. They give young people space and confidence to get their voices heard and change the world we live in. The website has lots of information on mental health and related topics.



Childline is here to help anyone under 19 in the UK with any issue they're going through. You can talk about anything - whether it's something big or small, our trained counsellors they are there to support you. Their website also has lots of information, advice, tools and more.



Mind are a large mental health charity who provide advice and support to anyone experiencing a mental health problem. They also campaign to improve services, raise awareness and promote understanding. Their website has a section with advice and information specifically for young people. Our local branch of Mind is called Solent Mind and information on local services and events can be found on their website.