

BRANCATI CENTER BULLETIN



DEAR NEIGHBORS,

As we approach the end of the year, we discuss important health topics related to winter and the holidays in this issue of the Brancati Bulletin. We share ways to stay healthy during the holidays with good lifestyle habits. We remind everyone to get vaccinated to protect against COVID-19 infection and review the currently updated COVID-19 vaccines available. In addition, we highlight Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD), which affects millions of Americans each year. We at the Brancati Center applaud your commitment to health and wish you a safe and happy holidays. See you in 2024!

-The Brancati Center Team

COVID CORNER

The best way to stay protected from COVID-19 infection is to get vaccinated and practice good hand hygiene.

There are 3 different vaccines currently FDA approved and available in the United States:

- Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna COVID-19 vaccines
- Novavax COVID-19 vaccine

Please note the Johnson & Johnson/Janssen COVID-19 vaccine is no longer available in the United States.

Which COVID-19 vaccine should I get?

- You should get one updated Pfizer-BioNTech or Moderna COVID-19 vaccine regardless of vaccination status in previous years. You do not have to get the same vaccine brand you previously received (you may get Moderna if you previously had Pfizer).
- If you choose Novavax, you will need to get 2 doses of the Novavax COVID-19 vaccine.

HOW TO STAY HEALTHY DURING THE HOLIDAYS

The holidays are a time of year when many of us enjoy time with loved ones, taking part in celebrations and social gatherings. While these are wonderful things to look forward to, maintaining healthy lifestyle habits may also be more challenging this time of year. Many people experience unwanted weight gain as a result. Here is a list of tips to help you stay on track with your health goals while participating in holiday festivities:

- Talk with friends and family about how you can incorporate healthy foods, such as fruits and vegetables, into holiday meals.
- Eat vegetables before other foods to ensure you are filling up on more nutritious foods first. This may make it easier to avoid overeating more indulgent foods.
- Make sure to get enough sleep, as poor sleep can cause fatigue, lower your motivation to stay active and may promote mindless eating.
- Find creative ways to stay active, such as taking walks with family and friends before or after meals and having a post-meal dance party.
- Try to maintain your normal routine for eating and exercise around the times you are celebrating.





Spotlight:

Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD)

As we transition from fall to winter, we would like to highlight a mental health condition that affects many people this time of year, Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD). Seasonal Affective Disorder is a form of depression that occurs with seasonal change, typically beginning in late fall or early winter and lasts 4-5 months until the spring and summer months.

Symptoms of SAD in the winter months may include:

- Feeling sad or anxious
- Feelings of hopelessness, guilt, or lack of worth
- Loss of interest in hobbies or activities you usually enjoy
- Decreased energy level or fatigue
- Sleep disturbances (oversleeping)
- Difficulty concentrating, remembering details or making decisions
- Thoughts of self-harm or death
- Change in appetite (overeating with increased cravings for carbohydrates) and weight gain
- Social withdrawal

Vitamin D is also believed to promote serotonin activity. The body makes vitamin D in response to sunlight exposure on the skin. With less daylight in the winter, individuals with SAD may have lower levels of vitamin D, further contributing to less serotonin activity.

Melatonin, which is a hormone that helps regulate our normal sleep-wake cycle, also appears to be altered in individuals with SAD, leading to increased sleepiness and oversleeping.

How is SAD diagnosed?

SAD may be diagnosed by a health care provider if you meet the following criteria:

- You have symptoms of depression or winter-pattern depression symptoms listed above.
- The depressive episodes occur during specific seasons for at least 2 consecutive years.
- Depressive episodes are more frequent during a specific season than at other times of the year.

How do you treat SAD?

There are four types of treatment for SAD, including:

- Light therapy: exposure to a bright light box daily for 30-45 minutes usually first thing in the morning.
- Psychotherapy: also called talk therapy or counseling, helps individuals with SAD reframe thoughts or make behavioral changes which can improve symptoms.
- Vitamin D: supplementation with vitamin D may help individuals who have been diagnosed with a deficiency.
- Antidepressant medication: medications used to treat depression may be effective alone or in combination with therapy.

All forms of treatment for SAD should be administered under the guidance and supervision of a licensed health care provider.



Community Events

The Brancati Center had the unique opportunity to connect with over 300 attendees to provide Diabetes Prevention Program and Diabetes Self Management resources at the Older Adults Thriving Summit on December 12th.

We are in the process of scheduling health screening events for 2024. If you are interested in collaborating with the Brancati Center, please contact us at brancaticenter@jhmi.edu.



The Sydney Kimmel Comprehensive Cancer Center Education Sessions

Join the Webinar:

**Cervical Cancer:
What You Need to
Know**

January 16, 2023
at 6:00 pm

REGISTER
HERE

