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# Saginaw, Aleda E. Lutz VAMC

## Inpatient Rehabilitation Unit

Community Living Center Building 22



### Inside this issue

- Thank You to all Veterans.....1
- Seasonal Affective Disorder ....2-5
- Tips For Stress-Free Holidays...6-9

**Our team is honored to serve you!**



Its that time of year again in Michigan the clocks have been set back. There is more darkness than daylight. People may notice that they feel less energetic, have a decreased interest in daily activities, problems sleeping, changes in appetite, difficulty concentrating and social withdrawal. These are a few of the symptoms of Seasonal Affective Disorder or SAD. This was once known as the winter blues. Symptoms are most prevalent in the winter and decrease once the days start getting longer. Millions of people suffer from SAD, 6% of the population with most of those in the northern climates. (National Library of Medicine).

Who is at risk for developing SAD? According to the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH), SAD is more common in women and to those living farther north where there are shorter daylight hours in the winter.

How does a person get diagnosed with SAD? Per the NIMH to be diagnosed with SAD an individual must meet the following criteria:

- Have symptoms of major depression.
- The depressive episodes must occur during specific seasons i.e., only the winter months for at least 2 consecutive years. However, it should be noted that not all people with SAD experience symptoms every year.
- The depressive episodes must be much more frequent than other depressive episodes that the person may have had other times of the year during their lifetime.

What causes SAD? With the increase in darkness some people produce too much melatonin which increases sleepiness and a decrease in serotonin which helps regulate mood. Deficits in vitamin D may exacerbate these problems.

What are the treatments for SAD.

**LIGHT THERAPY:** Use of a bright light box (10,000 lux) every day for 30 to 45 minutes usually first thing in the morning from fall to spring. People with certain eye disease and who take medication which increase sensitivity to sunlight may need to use alternative treatments and talk to their medical provider prior to utilizing the light therapy.

Other treatment may include the use of EAP, reaching out to loved ones, exercise, avoid negative thoughts, Psychotherapy or Behavioral therapy, antidepressant medications and vitamin D. Get outside as much as possible.

Above information was found on the National Institute of Mental Health web site

[www.nimh.nih.gov/health](http://www.nimh.nih.gov/health).

## Tips on how to have Stress-Free Holidays

**Maintain your foundation for mental wellness by [eating healthy](#), [exercising regularly](#), and [getting enough sleep](#).** These three things can have a significant impact on how you handle stress, as well as affect your overall mood.

**Practice patience and forgiveness.** You are not perfect, neither is anyone else, so be patient and forgiving of yourself and others. By controlling what you allow to upset you, you can regulate your emotions and reduce stress.

**Manage your expectations.** Not everyone is going to feel comfortable scouring the stores for the perfect gift or attending holiday festivities this year, so practice mindfulness and understanding towards others. Try to accept family members and friends as they are, even if they don't live up to your expectations.



**Take a break from social media.** Absorbing yourself in photos and posts of other peoples' perfect moments can create unrealistic expectations and pressure. Remember, all is not always as it seems.

**Create a budget.** Take account of your finances, list your upcoming expenses, and create a realistic budget for the amount of money that you can afford to spend on food, gifts and other holiday related festivities. Once your budget is made, stick to it all costs!

**Manage your time.** The hustle and bustle of the holidays can be overwhelming, so schedule your events and tasks with a planner or app so that you do not overextend yourself. Prioritize events that you are excited about attending and decline other offers without guilt. Remember to leave ample time for rest and self-care.

**Delegate.** If you are hosting an event or gathering, do not feel like you must do everything yourself. Most people are happy to help! In fact, by asking a guest to pick up an item or complete a task to lighten your to do list, you are making them feel included and needed.

**Avoid traffic and crowds.** If you want to avoid the stress of congested traffic and crowded shops, try shopping online or at off-hours, like before work or in the evening. Many retailers and grocery stores are offering free curbside pick-up during the COVID-19 pandemic, which is not only safer, but also a convenient time-saver.

**Think virtually.** If traveling to attend a family gathering feels unsafe or overwhelming, then don't. Instead, suggest that a virtual meeting place be set up for loved ones to join in, like [Google Meet](#) or [Zoom](#). A virtual station (computer, tablet, or other internet device) can be set up at the gathering, overlooking the festivities and in a place where loved ones can sit and engage with those attending virtually.



**Practice self-care.** Take time to unwind and recharge. Whether engaging in an activity you enjoy, taking a walk, reading a book, taking a long soak in a bubble bath or something else, practicing [self-care](#) can keep you healthy, reduce stress and elevate your mood.

**Practice generosity of spirit.** If you feel your holiday spirit waning, take some time to [volunteer](#) and/or practice random acts of [kindness](#). Not only can it reduce your stress, but it can also provide you with a sense of meaning and purpose which can ignite passion and increase happiness.



For more information or any questions on the Inpatient CARF Rehab Program you may contact Constance Louis, CARF Coordinator/LPTA at (989) 497-2500 Ext 11060