

# TO YOUR HEALTH

Carleton-Willard Out-Patient Clinic

100 Old Billerica Road, Bedford MA 01730

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## JOY?

By Susan Cusson, NP

Happy holidays! Music fills the air, festive parties abound and decorations adorn the Village. Such a joyous time of year! Everyone's happy during the holidays, right? Not so. Truth be told, many people feel lonely, sad, anxious and depressed this time of year. How can this be?

**A number of factors, including unrealistic expectations and too many commitments can cause stress, anxiety and sadness at holiday time. Some circumstances that might negatively affect mood include:**

- ◆ **Pressure to feel merry:** Not everyone feels the holiday spirit as joyous. The disparity between how you actually feel and what you think you are supposed to feel can lead to feelings of guilt and confusion.
- ◆ **Reminders of loved ones lost:** Holidays are a time for reflection. Your thoughts may turn to beloved family members and friends who have passed away. The subsequent sense of loss you feel can spoil even the happiest of celebrations.
- ◆ **Loneliness:** Holidays can be dreadfully lonely if you don't have a significant other. Additionally, separation from family members (emotional or geographic) can be particularly painful at this time of year.
- ◆ **Shorter days:** Many people are adversely impacted by the relative loss of sunlight during the winter months. This phenomenon is called seasonal affective disorder or SAD and is actually fairly common. In New England it is estimated that 10% of the population are affected compared with less than 2% in Florida.

**If any of these reasons for feeling down sound familiar, don't despair. Here are some ways for you to beat those holiday blues:**

- ◆ **Recognize and acknowledge your feelings:** If you don't feel as happy as you think you should, don't fight it. Forcing feelings that aren't there will only make matters worse.
- ◆ **Seek sun:** If you find yourself feeling blue, be sure to get at least 20 minutes of sunlight each day. This isn't always easy to do when winter weather hits, but do your best. Regular exposure to light that is bright, even indoor fluorescent light, can significantly improve mood. And don't forget to exercise. Both light and exercise help fight any chemical causes for the blues.
- ◆ **Help someone else:** It's hard to feel down while you are busy helping someone else. Instead of feeling glum you'll find yourself experiencing what the holidays are really about: giving to others.
- ◆ **Stay busy and avoid unstructured time:** Try to fill your calendar with fun events. Reach out to friends. Too much time spent alone may bring you down. Strong social ties increase well being.
- ◆ **Most importantly, think of the blessings you do have:** Taking stock of all of the positives in your life — right here and now — can go a long way toward improving your mood.

**As the days shorten and we anticipate the coming of wintery weather, it's easy to indulge in gloom. Having a positive winter mindset isn't easy when we make small talk by being negative about the winter. What can we do to cope better with the dark and cold?**

Finding a way to think about cold weather positively can actually improve your sense of well being. Perhaps we can take some lessons from Norwegians. Even deep into the winter in northern Norway, when the sun doesn't rise above the horizon, the rates of seasonal depression are lower than one would expect. Researcher Kari Leibowitz, a PhD student from Stanford University, recently spent a year in Norway studying this phenomenon. She found that people in Norway view winter as something to be enjoyed, not just endured. Norwegians celebrate the things one can only do in winter. There's a saying in Norway "there's no such thing as bad weather, only bad clothing".


Mindset research is increasingly finding that it doesn't take much to shift one's thinking. Making an effort to consciously try to have a positive wintertime mindset might be enough to induce it. When the temperatures drop and the snow falls, look for the beauty that is all around you. Talk about how the cold gives you a chance to drink hot tea or hot chocolate. Share memories of building snowmen or other outdoor winter activities. Bundle up and go for a walk outside, knowing you'll feel better after a few minutes. Better yet, go with a friend. Social plans are a great reason to get yourself out from under the covers.

A change in mindset can do more than just distract you from the weather, it can actually improve overall mental health. With a little bit of planning and forethought, the holidays and winter can be wonderful. Here's hoping we can all find more reasons to celebrate the joy of the season.




## ANNOUNCEMENTS

We are sad to announce the retirement of Dr. Norman Weinberg at the end of this month. Dr. Weinberg has been providing primary care to many residents at Carleton-Willard for over 20 years. There will be a farewell reception held on Thursday, December 3rd in the Red Room from 10:00am-11:30am. Please stop by to wish him well in his retirement.




The Village Clinic will close at 1:00 pm on Thursday, December 24th and will remain closed on Friday, December 25th . The Clinic will reopen Saturday, December 26th 9:00am –12:00pm  
Enjoy your Holiday!



## NEW PHYSICIAN

We are happy to announce that Dr. Elissa Stecker will be joining our medical staff. She practices at Mt. Auburn Healthcare in Waltham and is also an Instructor in Medicine at Harvard Medical School. She comes to CWV highly recommended by her associate Dr. Cherie Noe, our Medical Director.



Wishing you a joyful Holiday season  
and a New Year blessed with health, happiness and peace!  
From the Clinic staff: Susan,  
Debbie, Judi, Andrea and Michelle

