



# WELLNESS OUTLOOK

Helping SouthEast Michigan Residents Maximize their Mental Health Since 1983

Ann Arbor Consultation Services

Vol. 01 No. 02 Strategies for Self-Help

## Making New Years Resolutions Stick

Start the New Year off on the right foot

Most of us make New Year's Resolutions, and most of us will make the same one multiple times before we are successful. Get a head start this year and increase your chances of success by thinking about your potential resolution(s) and equipping yourself with tools to help you succeed. Here, we detail self-help books that will help you accomplish some common New Year's goals.

**Exercise** Recommendations in this area (how much is enough, et cetera) seem to vary frequently. Regardless, it is well accepted that some activity is better than no activity, and taking small steps towards a goal is better than taking a big leap. So instead of making a resolution to run a marathon, why not make one to be a bit more active almost every day? Harvey Simon, MD's *No Sweat Exercise Plan* is a good start.

**Lose Weight** Many diets have the potential for success: Research indicates that one reason diets aren't effective in the long run is due to the way we think about dieting and weight loss. Dr. Judith Beck's *The Beck Diet Solution* (and accompanying workbook) provides specific strategies that will help many people be more likely to stick to diets and maintain weight loss. And it is always a good idea to try to feel good about yourself no matter what you weigh: Renowned body image expert Thomas Cash, PhD has recently revised his



classic *Body Image Workbook*.

**Enjoy Life More** As outlined in our premiere issue of this newsletter, psychologists are developing research-based, practical strategies that are likely to make people happier. Dr. Lyubomirsky's *The How of Happiness* is an excellent example that details specific steps to happiness. Visit our website Resources section for more information.

**Stop Smoking** Effective smoking cessation programs do three to four things: Help motivate people to stop smoking, help smokers deal with cravings and lapses in effective ways, provide tools to reduce lapses (such as stress management, reducing

negative moods such as boredom and anger), and even help quitters to reduce weight gain post-quitting. Allan Carr's *Easyway to Stop Smoking* generally covers most of these areas.

**Manage Money More Effectively** is another common resolution. Try one of the budgeting books we recommend, such as *Personal Finance for Dummies*.

**Be a Better Parent or Partner** There are a number of good options in this category. For couples, try any of Dr. John Gottman's books (his most popular is *Seven Principles for Making Marriage Work*) or Dr. Sue Johnson's *Hold Me Tight*. Both are well-regarded researchers who study strategies to help couples improve their relationship. For parenting, an often-recommended book is Dr. Daniel Siegel's *Parenting from the Inside Out*. Dr. Robert Brooks' *Raising Relieitn Children* and Dr. John Gottman's *Raising an Emotionally Intelligent Child* are also good choices.

**Get Organized** Whether you procrastinate, are too busy and have difficulty with time management, or just need to be more organized, Mark Foster's *Do It Tomorrow* has novel ideas to help.

**Need additional help** sticking to your New Year's Resolution? Call Ann Arbor Consultation Services today. We have specialists who can help.

*Thanks to Kellie Mozena for suggesting this article*

## Seasonal Affective Disorder

Due to decreased daylight hours and seasonal cloudiness, Michiganders are particularly at risk for SAD

Sometimes the "winter blues" are more than just feeling blue, especially in an area like Michigan. About 10 percent of people who are prone to depression also have a condition known as Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD).

The trigger for SAD seems to be the change of season around mid to late autumn, and the rapid decrease in daylight, especially morning light, which impacts circadian rhythms. It is believed that certain individuals who have a tendency towards depression and therefore a deficiency in the brain chemicals related to depression (e.g., norepinephrine, serotonin) are especially vulnerable to decreased sunlight. SAD also tends to be a little more common in women than in men.

The symptoms of SAD include low energy, social withdrawal, sadness, overeating/weight gain and carbohydrate cravings.

The good news is that treatment is helpful in

about 80 per cent of cases. Treatment options include antidepressant medications, increased exposure to bright morning light for at least an hour, or cool bright light from fluorescent or halogen bulbs.

Keep in mind also that winter tends to mean we spend more time indoors doing fewer pleasurable activities (watching more television, etc) and exercise less. If you are at risk for SAD, targeting this can help. Working on managing your depressed thoughts (either through cognitive therapy, which is thinking about situations as accurately as possible; or mindfulness, described in the box to the right) can also help.

Interested in learning more? Contact us to meet with a depression specialist.



## WE CAN HELP

AACS has over 40 clinicians with a wide range of specialty areas. If you have a mental health concern, we have a clinician who can help.

## Shop our Best Picks Store

Not all self help books are created equal. We have partnered with Amazon.com to bring you the best of the best. Books from our current newsletter can be found in our "Featured Books" section. We also have books covering a wide variety of other topic areas. Shop our bookstore today.

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## DID YOU KNOW

One-third of Americans currently feel extremely stressed; half of Americans believe that their stress has increased over the past five years. And 4 in 5 Americans has felt negative effects of stress in the last month, in terms of health problems, relationship problems, or lost productivity. The good news? There are many effective, easy ways to manage stress that most of us are not using. Visit our website to learn more.

## Learn Mindfulness at AACCS

Robert Martin, MA, LMSW, is Ann Arbor Consultation Services' resident expert on mindfulness. He has over 25 years of experience studying, practicing and teaching the technique. Robert has recently started offering groups that teach the technique. Contact us at (734) 996-9111 to learn more.

If you'd like to try to learn the strategies on your own, visit our website Resources section for tips; Robert also recommends the book "Wherever you go, there you are" by Jon Kabat Zinn.

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# HOLIDAY SPENDING

## Keys to not breaking the bank

Few of us prepare financially for holiday gift-giving, and this year more than a few of us are feeling a financial pinch. Even if you had set up a monthly deposit "Holiday Fund" in July, you may have had to dip into it already. Even if things are going well economically, many of us tend to overspend during the holidays. Solutions?

**Follow the lead of big families** Draw names out of a hat, so that each person only buys one gift (with a monetary limit).

**Re-gift** As demonstrated in a classic Seinfeld episode, the trick is to avoid giving the gift back to the person you got it from last year.

**Shop Online** There are bargains to be had; Just be aware of the cost of shipping.

**Watch the paper for deals** Go to specific stores for special sales on an item you are looking for.

**Make a list (with spending limits)** Many of us tend to overspend at the grocery store when we don't make grocery lists. And many of us splurge on holiday gifts that we actually cannot afford (or buy things that are too extravagant and unnecessary even if we can afford them). Sticking to a list with a predetermined spending limit helps avoid impulse purchases. And it can also help to stick to cash; it is true that many of us spend more when we use

credit cards.

**Rainchecks and coupons** Create a homemade raincheck for an item that is likely to go on sale after the holidays. This can also be a good idea for hot toys that sell out due to high demand (such as the Nintendo Wii last year) instead of spending more than it is worth to buy it before the holidays on ebay. You can also create coupons for your services (lawn mowing, snow shoveling, a nice meal).

**Think homemade** The gifts people tend to treasure most are those with special meaning... and what is more special than a gift that is made by you, that comes from the heart? If you have children, they could help make a special piece of framed art, a calendar, a bookmark. If you are a skilled cook, making pies, cookies, jam, or other items is always a nice idea.

**Think traditions** Most of us don't remember all of the specific gifts we receive around the holidays, but rather who we spend them with and what we do together. Think about ways to cultivate traditions with your loved ones.

**Need additional help** managing your holiday spending? AACCS has budgeting specialists. Call us to find out more.



## Managing the Holiday Blues

For some of us, the holidays remind us of past holidays filled with a sense of dread, perhaps due to financial problems, a parent's past alcohol abuse, or domestic violence. Realizing that it is okay to have these feelings of dread or sadness is helpful to many people. It is also helpful to remember that that was then and this is now; reach out and talk to those who love you and can really help.

The holidays can also bring up feelings related to past or recent family losses. There may be an empty seat at the holiday

table. This may be a time of fond memories which also brings an awareness of losses: The first holiday after the death of a close relative is especially difficult, and also very normal in the grieving process. Some people find it helpful to start new traditions. Some set a place at the holiday dinner table as a memorial. Others light candles and display photos of love ones who have passed. Placing holiday mementos on graves is a way to feel closer, at this time of year.

Need more help? Call us today.

## Coping with the Economic Downturn

### Effective stress management strategies are particularly important in tough times.

Each year, the American Psychological Association conducts a survey that examines stress in the United States. This year's survey clearly indicated that the economic slowdown is taking a toll. The survey found that women, and particularly baby boomers, have been hardest hit by the downturn, both financially and in terms of its emotional impact (i.e., stress).

**Americans' stress has increased.** The survey found, unsurprisingly, that half of respondents thought their stress levels were worse this year as compared to 2007. Common consequences of stress, such as fatigue, irritability and anger, lying awake at night, headaches, and depression were more common this year as compared to last.

**How are we coping?** Similar to past years, the APA found that unhealthy coping strategies were most common, include overeating or eating too much unhealthy food, excessive sleeping, drinking alcohol, and smoking.

Many of us are well aware that stress impacts our health. But did you know that physicians estimate that most of their patients' office visits are stress-related in some way? Stress weakens the immune system, worsens physical functioning (causing headaches and stomachaches), and has been implicated as a factor in a variety of disease processes. Stress affects our mental functioning too: When overly stressed, we tend to have more trouble getting restful sleep, make poorer decisions, argue more with those close to us, and generally function less effectively (our best performance occurs under moderate, not excessive, levels of stress). Stress also causes depression, particularly when people believe their situation is hopeless or unpredictable (which is more likely to be the case during an economic downturn).

**What to do?** All of us benefit from using effective stress management strategies, whether we are directly affected by the downturn or not. These include:

**Manage your physical health.** Follow good nutritional guidelines, implement rules for good sleep, practice relaxation strategies (such as progressive muscle relaxation), yoga, and other strategies are helpful. Our website Resources section provides Tip Sheets on these topics with specific steps to follow. If you can do only one thing, make it cardiovascular exercise. Cardiovascular exercise is probably the single most powerful stress relief tool.

**Manage your thinking.** Many of us feel overwhelmed when stressed, and that tends to lead to snowballing thoughts that make a bad situation worse. For example, let's say your job was eliminated. A snowball thought would be "Its hopeless, I'll never get a job ever again." These thoughts are rarely true, and they tend to get in the way of effective problem-solving. At other times, there can even be a silver lining: Having dinner at home with your family not only saves money, but it will also bring you closer together.

**Reach out.** One of the best ways to relieve stress is to obtain tangible social support (i.e., think of the direct ways that others can help you). This may involve others helping you to solve problems or give you advice, to help you keep perspective, or even to give you a place to stay if you have lost your home.

**Problem-solve.** This is a particularly crucial step if you have been directly affected by the downturn. Identify your financial stressors and write down a plan, such as ways to reduce expenses or refrain for a new career; contact professionals if needed. Review your plan often. If you are having trouble paying bills, call the credit card, mortgage, utility, etc companies asap.

If you need additional help managing stress levels and/or coping with the downturn contact us today.



## Assertiveness

Most of us are not naturally assertive at all times in the course of everyday life. Instead, we generally encounter situations where it is easier to be assertive, and then experience other types of situations where we use at least one of 3 non-assertive communication strategies:

**Passive Communication**—this type of communicating involves putting other peoples' needs, wants and desires ahead of your own.

**Aggressive Communication**—this type of communicating is overly harsh at best and abusive at worst. In a nutshell it involves making one's own needs, wants and desires the most important.

**Passive-Aggressive Communication**—this type of communication can be the hardest to detect. It involves expressing one's needs in a confusing manner, so that the person ends up getting what they want without seeming to have asked for it.

**Assertive Communication**—this type of communication is direct, to-the-point, clear and appropriate. It is respectful of yourself and others: Your needs, wants and desires

are equally as important as the other person's.

**So how exactly do I say something assertively?** Many therapists teach the following: **Describe** the other person's behavior using a specific example; **Express** how you feel using an "I" statement; **Specify** specific changes you would like to see.

"I feel (emotion) when you (specific example of behavior). I would like you to (specific change you would like to see)." And remember to keep your nonverbals assertive—good posture, eye contact, etc cetera.

**One last thing.** At the end of the day, being assertive may not get you the results you want. In fact, when people begin acting more assertively, the important people in their lives tend to become even less assertive (i.e., things might get worse in the short run). But if you stick with it, it is likely that being assertive will pay off.

**To learn more** about assertive communication, call us to set up an appointment or visit our website Resources section for additional information on assertiveness.



Ann Arbor Consultation Services

(734) 996-9111

Visit us on the web for additional resources

[www.a2consultation.com](http://www.a2consultation.com)