

WINTER 2022

# CAREGIVER NEWSLETTER

Brought to you by Senior Community Services'  
Senior Outreach & Caregiver Services Team



## SNOW IS HERE

Happy New Year! As we enter into the least popular time of the year, it is worth pointing out some of its advantages. January, February and March provide us with some needed breaks from all the business of summer, fall and the holidays. A time to “recharge” after the holidays and an opportunity to make changes. Dust off the old “to do list” and make a fresh start! Home remodeling, hobbies, travel, reconnecting with friends, catching up on your reading, streaming movies...just examples of the many rewarding activities we can undergo this time of year. If we keep ourselves busy, spring will soon be knocking on our door again!

There is a peacefulness during winter months. It's beauty not obvious, but spectacular to those who discover it. Its silence is a needed respite. Its fierceness a display of power. Its treasure is a solace to all who find it, and its slumber provides tranquility to those who persevere.



## The Healing Power of Humor

We are all familiar with the statement “Laughter is the best medicine”. But can truth be found in this proverbial phrase? The answer is YES! Multiple studies have shown some amazing benefits to laughter. Let’s review a few of these benefits.

Laughter improves cardiac health. It gets our hearts pumping and can help lower blood pressure, therefore reducing the chance of heart attack and stroke.

Laughter reduces stress hormone levels. When we experience stress, the hormone Cortisol is released into the body.

Chronically elevated cortisol levels make us more vulnerable to an illness.

Laughter boosts our immune systems. When our immune systems are boosted, antibodies are released into our bodies helping us fight off illness and disease.

Laughter releases Endorphins in the body. Endorphins can help ease chronic pain and make us feel good.

Laughter helps muscles relax. Some reports suggest the relaxing effects can last for close to an hour!

Laughter eases depression and anxiety. It is difficult to feel negative emotions while laughing.

Laughter produces a sense of well-being. It helps us maintain a positive outlook, build resiliency during times of challenge and be empowering.

Laughter can bring people together and ease conflict. It can break down walls when tensions are high.

In one of his books, author Norman Cousins calls laughter “inner jogging” because a good belly laugh gives our body systems a complete workout. What a great description!

So, get ready to giggle!

A patient walks into the clinic and says, "Nurse! Please help me! I am shrinking. I am losing an inch of height every day!" The nurse responds, "I am sorry we have had an emergency and you are just going to have to be a little patient."

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## The Winter Blues and Seniors

As the winter months drag on, many seniors will fall into a state of depression known as Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD). Commonly known as the “winter blues”, this form of depression is caused in part by a lack of sunlight. Days are shorter and tend to be more overcast and cloudier. The temperature is colder, making it harder for seniors to get outside. There is also a loneliness that follows the festivities of the recent holidays, where more focus is placed on family gatherings and celebrations. These family celebrations can also lead to a lingering sadness remembering the loved ones who are no longer here.

Combined, these situations are a recipe for seasonal depression in seniors. It is estimated that about 15% of the elderly population will suffer SAD this year, with about 5% of those having severe depression that leads to other health issues. Your senior may share their feelings of sadness with you, or they may not. Either way, it’s important to recognize the signs that they may be suffering from seasonal depression.

The signs include: sadness or hopelessness that is present on most days and lasts more than two weeks, anxiety, irritability, social withdrawal, loss of interest in normal activities, lack of concentration, and, in severe cases, thoughts of suicide.

If you start to notice these signs in your elderly loved one, it should be addressed with their doctor right away.

SAD is really more than just the “winter blues”, but thankfully with some lifestyle adaptations and easily manageable changes, seasonal depression can often be controlled.

The tips we’ve listed below are useful for combating seasonal depression in seniors.

### **Brighten Up Their Surroundings**

Studies have shown that one of the major contributing factors of SAD is the lack of vitamin D from natural light. Make it part of their daily routine to open up the blinds or curtains. Encourage them to get outside when weather permits, even if it’s just to sit in the sunshine for 15 minutes at a time.

Light box therapy is another way to help with the effects caused by lack of natural light. According to the Mayo Clinic, exposure to a 10,000-lux light box for 20 to 30 consecutive minutes in the early part of the day (so as not to disrupt the sleep pattern) is one of the best treatments for SAD.

### **Maintain a Healthy Diet**

Cold weather is the season of comfort food...chicken pot pie, cream-based soups and stews, pumpkin pie, mac and cheese. The issue with many comfort foods, however, is that they tend to be full of fat and carbohydrates and loaded with sugar. One of the side effects of SAD is an increase in cravings for carbs.

There’s no harm in indulging in a treat occasionally, but a healthy diet can help ward off those winter blues by keeping energy levels high. It’s important to maintain a diet that is vitamin and mineral rich with lots of vegetables and fruit.

### **Get moving!**

Motivation to exercise is a tough one for seniors under most circumstances, and this motivation only decreases during winter months. Regular exercise is a natural mood enhancer, even in short spurts. It also helps to support overall cognitive function. Moderate daily exercise like short walks outdoors or swimming indoors is a good place to start. Any exercise that raises the heart rate is recommended, including daily chores.

### **Stay Socially Connected**

Seniors who stay connected with others socially also report having better mental health. Unfortunately, during winter months, the desire to be a social butterfly decreases dramatically. Add in the current ongoing pandemic, and you have a recipe for isolation and loneliness. It’s important that you stay connected with your senior loved one via phone or video calls, and regular visits as long as current COVID-19 CDC guidelines are followed.

Following the guidelines above will help a great deal when dealing with a loved one who is suffering from Seasonal Affective Disorder.

(From terranceridgegastonia.com)

*We all love to see new places and enjoy new adventures but traveling can be hectic and stressful. Whether you're a senior traveler or a caregiver traveling with a senior, the information below can help make your trip less stressful and more enjoyable!*

## **10 Travel Tips for Senior Travelers**

### **1. Find Senior Friendly Travel Services**

Whether you will travel together or your loved one will be solo- planning, reserving, and confirming must be accomplished sooner rather than later. When the destination involves target dates, research airlines, Amtrak, buses, cruise lines. For air and land transportation, seek the most direct and shortest travel times. If there is a choice of three airlines, for example, enroll your senior in the no-cost frequent flier program for each. This should give you easier access to their itinerary, benefits at the airport and aboard the flight, as well as a path for requesting special services.

### **2. Request and Reserve Elderly Accommodations**

Request seat assignment in the rows designated for disabled travelers. And, importantly, request cost-free wheelchair service at every airport origination, connection, and arrival location. If there is meal service aboard, advise the reservation system of any dietary needs.

If traveling alone, ensure your senior will have human assistance from the counter, through security, to the gate and then to board the aircraft. If staffed by an airline employee, there is no cost for wheelchair or assistance. If staffed by Red Cap-type personnel, you or your senior will be expected to tip for that assistance. If you are traveling together, you can offer to handle the wheelchair.

### **3. Prepare Personal and Medical Documentation**

A government passport is accepted as the highest level of identification by federal TSA security officers. If you or your loved one does not already have a passport, consider applying months prior to your travel. Your local post office will have the application forms; or you can go online to access the information and forms. Official photographs are available at AAA offices and at many large drug and department stores. Personal photos are not acceptable. Two copies of the photograph must be sent with your application.

Request copies of prescriptions and/or statements of medical conditions from each physician and medical treatment center.

Make at least three photocopy sets of the passport, driver's license, Medicare and insurance cards, travel tickets and itinerary, boarding pass (if secured in advance online), plus any physician prescriptions and/or statements. One complete set is placed in your senior's hand-carry bag, one set is forwarded to family members at the arrival destination, and one is left at home.

### **4. Packing Tips for Seniors**

Pack light. For a person traveling with at least some limitation, aim to pack everything necessary in a roll-aboard suitcase plus a medium-size over-the-shoulder carry-on. Do not check the roll-aboard as luggage, as in-cabin flight staff will gladly stash it in the overhead rack. Such will save a lot of time at the final destination airport.

All prescription and over-the-counter medications should be placed in a one-quart zip-lock freezer bag, including also copies of any prescriptions and/or physician statements in the hand-carry bag. Do not place the pill combinations separately into a separate plastic box as "the next combined dosage." Also enclose any medical appliances such as extra braces or first-aid needs.

If your loved one is toting gifts to relatives, do not wrap them. Place the items in the roll-aboard luggage.

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#### 5. Think about a Senior's Safety, Security and Comfort

Elders can be seen as vulnerable adults, particularly, in high-traffic travel centers. Don't allow them to become a target. Try a money belt worn under a blouse or a neat Passage Wallet hidden under the coat by a neck cord. Avoid purses and wallets in the back pocket. Advise them, if traveling alone, always to keep their carry-on between their feet when standing, or with the shoulder strap looped around the leg of a chair when seated. For comfort, consider the purchase of a travel pillow, a c-shaped balloon that supports the neck and head when resting aboard transportation.

#### 6. Arrange Medication Management

Most mature adults take five or more medications once or even several times a day. The transportation staff has no obligation regarding the medical dosing of your senior. Try a timer system and organized pill dispenser. If the trip is longer term, be sure your loved one has enough medication in advance of their departure. Pharmacies can arrange with physicians to ensure a senior has enough pills to maintain proper dosage until their return.

#### 7. Seniors and Security Checkpoints

For those that use wheelchairs, access to and through TSA (transportation security administration) security may actually be quicker than through the long line of other travelers. Be prepared to brief your senior on TSA procedures regarding any medical condition that would set off alarms, such as surgical hip and knee implants, or be seen in scans such as prosthetics or infusion ports. To avoid unwanted delays, get a physician's statement or the device's description card (often provided at time of implant) and make sure the senior has that documentation with them. Oftentimes, personnel will ask the elderly to step aside and perform a wand screening, rather than passing through the sensors.

#### 8. Consider an Aging Adult's Bucket List

The world of travel is open to just about everyone. Start a discussion with your loved one to learn her or his travel wishes. Determine if your senior can travel solo, or if you want or need to share in the adventure. Start with the mission of fulfilling an aging adult's dream; don't just go online to find cheap air tickets.

#### 9. Choose a Senior Friendly Tour or Cruise

There are thousands of tour and cruise possibilities. Tours and cruises offer a unique service, in that they are totally planned, operated, and staffed to deliver the promised program and destination discovery. Several tour operators, including Accessible Journeys and Flying Wheels, specialize in "accessible lifestyle vacations," which cater to those with special needs and disabilities.

#### 10. Ensure the Destination Can Support a Senior's Care Needs

If flying solo to visit other family, schedule a telephone conference with your relatives to go over the caregiving support your elder needs. Advise of your loved one's favorite foods and activities so that they can try to be accommodating during the visit, making it all the more "like home." And, importantly, advise of the medical and medication regimen that must be followed. Also make sure that they have all important legal documents with them should an emergency arise (for example, if you are listed as their agent for the Advanced Directive, be certain this information is with them should something happen).

(Adapted from [agingcare.com](http://agingcare.com))







## Why Respite?

Respite Care is a term that is frequently misunderstood or dismissed. What exactly is respite care and why is it so important?

The dictionary defines respite as an interval of rest or relief. Respite Care provides temporary short-term relief for the caregiver, allowing them to take a break from their responsibilities. Primary caregivers dedicate themselves to meeting the basic needs of their loved ones, ensuring comfort and safety. Caregiving is rewarding but also very demanding. Frequently the health, social relationships, careers and mental health of the caregiver are neglected. This can lead to isolation, exhaustion and even burnout. Respite care is crucial for the caregiver to receive the rest and rejuvenation required to effectively continue in their role. According to an article in Caring Today, “family caregivers suffer from a chronic condition more than twice the rate as non-caregivers and stress from providing care can take as much as ten years off a family caregiver’s life”. Therefore, respite care should be seen not as a luxury but as a necessity.

Respite Care can take many forms. It can be short periods of in-home services allowing the caregiver to run errands, go to needed personal doctor appointments, or meet a friend for coffee. Some services offered by respite include household tasks, meal prep, transportation, supervision and companionship. Services can be informal such as a friend or relative sitting with your loved one or formal services provided by an agency. Just a couple of hours a week can make a big difference.

Out of home services are also a consideration. Options include a short term stay at a Memory Care or Assisted Living facility allowing opportunity for the caregiver to take a vacation. Adult Day Services may also be helpful for daily breaks. Getting out of the house is beneficial not only for the caregiver but also provides socialization opportunities for the one being cared for.

It can be difficult for caregivers to admit they need help and allow someone else to take over, even for a few hours but here are a few important questions to ask yourself:

Do you feel emotionally and physically drained on a regular basis? Do you experience feelings of helplessness?

Are you concerned there is no one to care for your loved one in the event of an emergency?

Do you find yourself becoming more easily agitated? Are you experiencing feelings of resentment toward others or the person you care for?

Are you neglecting your own health and self-care needs or self-medicating with drug or alcohol use?

Is your social life suffering?

If you answered yes to any of these questions, it may be time to explore respite care. It is an essential tool in the caregiver toolbox. If you have questions and/or would like to talk with someone about respite service options, please call 612-770-7005 and one of our Social Workers will be happy to speak with you.







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## SENIOR RESOURCES



### Guardianship Information

The Center for Excellence in Supported Decision Making with Estate & Elder Law Services through Volunteers of America is able to provide individualized consultation to individuals, families, and professionals through Minnesota's free Guardianship Information Line. Please contact them at [cesdm@voamn.org](mailto:cesdm@voamn.org); 952-945-4174 or toll free 844-333-1748.



Volunteers of America®

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The Gratitude app was created by Pritesh Sankhe, a mobile app developer based in India. He once worked for Facebook as a software engineer. Sankhe built the Gratitude app as a free app, or, as he said, “No cost, and is intended for use as is.”

The app aims to be an avenue for those suffering from anxiety and depression. It helps users improve their mental health and change their perception of life. Overall, the app intends to teach you how to love and care for yourself through the power of gratefulness.

Some of the features of the Gratitude app include a daily dose of inspiring quotes and affirmations, letters of gratitude, photo attachments, and daily reminders. It is literally a gratitude journal that you can use whenever and wherever.



## CAREGIVER TIPS

### The Power of Self-Compassion

Forgiving and nurturing yourself can set the stage for better health, relationships, and general well-being. Self-compassion yields a number of benefits, including lower levels of anxiety and depression. Self-compassionate people recognize when they are suffering and are kind to themselves at these times, which reduces their anxiety and related depression.

Harvard psychologist Christopher Germer, in his book *The Mindful Path to Self-Compassion*, suggests that there are five ways to bring self-compassion into your life: via physical, mental, emotional, relational, and spiritual methods. He and other experts have proposed a variety of ways to foster self-compassion. Here are a few:

1. Comfort your body. Eat something healthy. Lie down and rest your body. Massage your own neck, feet, or hands. Take a walk. Anything you can do to improve how you feel physically gives you a dose of self-compassion.
2. Write a letter to yourself. Describe a situation that caused you to feel pain (a breakup with a lover, a job loss, a poorly received presentation). Write a letter to yourself describing the situation without blaming anyone. Acknowledge your feelings.
3. Give yourself encouragement. If something bad or painful happens to you, think of what you would say to a good friend if the same thing happened to him or her. Direct these compassionate responses toward yourself.
4. Practice mindfulness. This is the nonjudgmental observation of your own thoughts, feelings, and actions, without trying to suppress or deny them. When you look in the mirror and don't like what you see, accept the bad with the good with a compassionate attitude.

(From Harvard Medical School – Healthbeat newsletter)



### Would a camera system help?

Many caregivers have concerns with leaving their loved one alone at times. Maybe they are having falls, are recovering from a virus, or are more confused. Installing a camera in the main living area or kitchen is a non-invasive way to keep an eye on someone when you aren't there. Most systems have apps on your smartphone. Caregivers report a sense of freedom when they can run errands and attend support groups because they can peek at their phone and see what's going on with their care receiver.





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# Caregiver Support Groups

Additional services on other side

Caregiver support groups, facilitated by our licensed Social Workers, offer a safe place for caregivers to learn from one another by sharing experiences, challenges, coping strategies, and humor. The goal is to help caregivers care for themselves through education and empowerment.

**Bloomington** - Lisa Engdahl, LSW  
4th Thursday each month  
1:00 PM - 2:30 PM  
  
952-767-7890 or  
l.engdahl@seniorcommunity.org

**Chanhassen** - Lee Ann Eiden, MSW  
1st Thursday each month  
1:30 PM - 3:30 PM

**Eden Prairie** - Lee Ann Eiden, MSW  
3rd Thursday each month  
4:30 PM - 6:00 PM  
  
952-934-3370  
or l.eiden@seniorcommunity.org

**Edina** - Krystal Wiebusch, LSW  
1st Thursday each month  
1:00 PM - 2:30 PM  
  
952-767-7899 or  
k.wiebusch@seniorcommunity.org

**Elk River** - Becky Allard, LSW  
2nd Monday each month  
1:30 PM - 3:00 PM  
  
612-804-0968 or  
b.allard@seniorcommunity.org

**Minnetonka** - Adele Mehta, LGSW  
2nd Thursday each month  
10:00 AM - 11:30 AM  
  
952-767-7888 or  
a.mehta@seniorcommunity.org

**Monticello** - Becky Allard, LSW  
2nd Thursday each month  
10:30 AM - 12:00 PM  
  
612-804-0968 or  
b.allard@seniorcommunity.org

**Plymouth** - Krystal Wiebusch, LSW  
3rd Wednesday each month  
10:00 AM - 11:30 AM  
  
952-767-7899 or  
k.wiebusch@seniorcommunity.org

**Rogers** - Becky Allard, LSW  
1st Monday each month  
10:30 AM - 12:00 PM

**St. Michael** - Becky Allard, LSW  
3rd Thursday each month  
1:30 PM - 3:00 PM  
  
612-804-0968 or  
b.allard@seniorcommunity.org

**Contact the facilitator to register. No fee. Join any time.**

Groups are open to caregivers who live in (or are caring for someone who lives in) Carver, Hennepin, Scott, or Wright county and caring for an older adult or someone with a cognitive diagnosis.

[seniorcommunity.org/caregiversupportgroups](https://seniorcommunity.org/caregiversupportgroups)

612-770-7005

This service is supported, in part, by Hennepin County, municipalities, and Title III grants from Trellis & CMCOA.

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# Additional Caregiver Support Options

Caregiver support groups, facilitated by our licensed Social Workers, provide caregivers an opportunity to learn from one another by sharing experiences, challenges, coping strategies, and humor. The goal is to help caregivers care for themselves through education and empowerment.

## VIRTUAL SUPPORT GROUPS

Bob Anderson, MSW

2nd Thursday each month

4:30 PM - 6:00 PM

952-888-7121 or

[b.anderson@seniorcommunity.org](mailto:b.anderson@seniorcommunity.org)

## MEMORY CAFES

Prior Lake – Lisa Engdahl, LSW

Last Tuesday each month

3:30 PM – 5:00 PM

952-767-7890 or

[l.engdahl@seniorcommunity.org](mailto:l.engdahl@seniorcommunity.org)

Sara Roberts, LSW

### Memory Loss Focus

4th Monday each month

1:30 PM - 3:00 PM

612-868-6720 or

[s.roberts@seniorcommunity.org](mailto:s.roberts@seniorcommunity.org)

St. Michael – Becky Allard, LSW

3rd Wednesday each month

1:30 PM – 2:30 PM

612-804-0968 or

[b.allard@seniorcommunity.org](mailto:b.allard@seniorcommunity.org)



[CareNextion.org](http://CareNextion.org)

Caregiving is a group effort. You don't need to do it alone. Create your care team today!

CareNextion is a free, secure online tool that provides care teams of families and friends with centralized communication, including task scheduling & assignment, journaling, and local resources.

[seniorcommunity.org/caregiversupportgroups](http://seniorcommunity.org/caregiversupportgroups)

612-770-7005