

# *Eastwind Healing Center Newsletter, Number 7*

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*Iowa's complete complementary and alternative medicine center*

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Welcome to this edition of the Eastwind Healing Center newsletter.

**Happy Holidays!** Or is it Happy Holidaze?? This time of year can be quite stressful, from the feeding frenzy at the malls to negotiating the minefield of those fun-filled family gatherings. This month, we have a cornucopia of suggestions and strategies for coping with holiday stress and seasonal depression. So, turn those full spectrum lights up real bright and read on.

Special announcement: there will be no newsletter next month, due to the above-mentioned holidays. We'll see you again in early February. Hey, even us alternative medicine types need a breather this time of year. And speaking of which, check out the article below on proper [breathing](#).

We welcome feedback on our newsletter, and would love to hear from you if you have a request for coverage of a topic from a holistic perspective. [So, email us already!](#)

### Staff Announcements:

- In the "Brushes with Greatness" department, Eastwind was the setting for a live television spot on the Keith Olbermann show on MSNBC. Senator John Edwards, Democratic aspirant for President, was interviewed in the Eastwind space on November 29th. If you saw the show, you'll recognize the wall color behind Senator Edwards. OK, OK, it didn't say "Live from Eastwind" on the screen, but it was pretty cool nonetheless - and Edwards is one terrific guy. This week, Oprah is coming to town. Maybe we can get her to come on over for a tour or something.
  - Dr. Michael Santangelo has posted a new, thought-provoking article on Eastwind Healing Center's website entitled *The Roles of Knowledge, Wisdom, and Understand in Health*. Read it [here](#). It is also available via the site's [Home page](#) or at the site's [Archives](#).
  - Kristen Bergman, massage therapist and doula, has been busy as well, planning her second Conscious Birth Summit, on Friday January 25th, 2008. You can read about it [here](#). Read more about Kristen's views on the sacredness of birth [here](#).
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## **Betsy Rippentrop, Ph.D.**



Dr. Betsy Rippentrop became fascinated by the mind-body connection after taking her first meditation/relaxation course 14 years ago. Learning to use her mind to melt away her tension, anxiety, and stress was profound and life-altering.

This experience led her to pursue her PhD in counseling psychology, with an emphasis in health psychology. She completed her doctoral training at the University of Iowa, and her clinical internship at Rush Medical Center in Chicago. She completed her post-doctoral work at the University of Iowa Hospitals and Clinics in pain management. For the past 2 years, she has been in private practice at Eastwind Healing Center. She chose Eastwind as the home for her practice because of the holistic philosophy embodied here and the range of expertise provided by the various practitioners.

Betsy provides a variety of services including talk therapy, hypnosis, chakra work, and mind-body psychotherapy that integrates energy work with psychological processing. Her training in pain management makes her an ideal practitioner for problems such as

fibromyalgia, migraine headaches, and low-back pain. Those with anxiety and depression find her mind-body approach a welcome perspective, as she helps clients dig deep into the reservoirs of their mind and the wisdom of the body for insight and healing.

Training in hypnosis for medical and emotional problems prompted Betsy to become interested in hypno-birthing, or the use of hypnosis to lessen anxiety and pain during childbirth. She enjoys working with pregnant women and their partners to prepare minds and bodies for the process of birth. In addition to individual work, look for her upcoming class on Hypnosis for Childbirth.

A final element that Betsy hopes to add to her practice in the coming year is the use of yoga to improve mental and physical health. She currently is training to become a certified Anusara yoga teacher. Yoga is truly a mind-body discipline, and Betsy wants to integrate this ancient healing tool into her work with clients.

Betsy is a licensed psychologist and Wellmark Blue Cross/Blue Shield Insurance provider. She is currently taking new clients.

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## Breathing



*Life is in the breath. He who half breathes, half lives.*  
--Ancient Proverb

Do it right now.  
Take a deep, full breath.  
Now exhale it slowly. Slowly.  
Do it again. Take another deep, full breath. Let it out slowly.  
And again.  
Establish a nice, quiet rhythm. Always exhale more slowly than you inhale.  
Already you should feel calmer, more relaxed.

If you do nothing more than this simple exercise every time you become tense, your sense of well-being will begin to change for the better.

Not all stressful events can be banished but the stress-tension cycle can be broken. Reactions to stress can be transformed from tension, anxiety, and fatigue to a healthy, focused vitality that allows you to understand and overcome the problems that seep into your life. Yes, it can all be done through the breath.

Research has shown that slowing down and deepening our breath shifts us from the stress response to the relaxation response; this slows the heart, normalizes blood pressure, increases blood flow to the digestive system, deepens sleep, increases energy, focus, concentration and memory. Here is the basic breathing technique: Abdominal Breath:  
The Natural Breath

- Lie on your back or stand or sit comfortably and place your hands on your stomach (abdomen). It is easier to lie on your back.
- Inhale slowly and deeply, letting your abdomen expand like a balloon. (Keep your hand on your abdomen. You will feel it expanding.)
- Let the abdomen fall as you exhale slowly; you are releasing old, stale air.
- Inhale easily. Feel your abdomen expand again.
- Press the air out as you contract, as you pull in your abdomen while exhaling.

For maximum effect, do this exercise in a relaxed setting where you can be alone for at least a few minutes.

How you breathe affects your whole being. Give this exercise a try and begin to notice how you're breathing throughout your day.

(this is excerpted from the book *Breathe In Breathe Out* by James E. Loehr, Ed.D. and Jeffrey A Migdow, M.D.)

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## Natural Remedies for Depression



Although antidepressant medications have been very beneficial for a number of people suffering from depression and anxiety, anyone who has taken antidepressant medications can attest, there are often many unpleasant side effects. These include dry mouth, constipation, weight gain, decreased libido, dizziness, drowsiness, difficulty sleeping, etc. One antidepressant even advertises that a possible side effect is suicide!

Luckily there are several alternatives for the treatment of depression. The three substances most often studied and used are SAMe, St. John's Wort, and 5-HTP.

*Note: If you are not taking an antidepressant medication, or you would like to switch your medication, it is important to discuss any of these alternatives with your health care provider.*

### **SAMe**

Several recent studies have added to a body of evidence suggesting that the substance SAMe (S-Adenosyl-L-Methionine) is an effective antidepressant. In the U.S. SAMe is available over-the-counter and in health food stores (we've even seen it at HyVee!).

A 2002 Italian study found SAMe to be as effective as imipramine, one of the original tricyclic antidepressants. The researchers also found that SAMe subjects reported fewer side-effects than subjects who took imipramine. This research and earlier studies are summarized in Medline. This particular study did not compare SAMe to placebo, though previous studies have found it to be superior to placebo. Should you take it? That's a difficult question to answer, and the answer depends very much on your individual situation. If you are already taking an antidepressant you should not take SAMe. Little research has been done on how SAMe will interact with other medications. While SAMe appears to be an effective antidepressant, long term studies have not been done. SAMe does appear to hold promise as a natural substance that helps depression.

### **St. John's Wort**

St. John's wort is an herb that has been used for centuries for medicinal purposes, including the treatment of depression. The composition of St. John's wort and how it might work are not well understood, although the active ingredients that produce the herb's effects are believed to be the compounds hypericin and hyperforin.

St. John's wort has been used for centuries to treat mental disorders as well as nerve pain. In ancient times, doctors and herbalists wrote about its use as a sedative and treatment for malaria as well as a balm for wounds, burns, and insect bites. Today, St. John's wort is used by some people to treat mild to moderate depression, anxiety, or sleep disorders.

There is some scientific evidence that St. John's wort is useful for treating mild to moderate depression. However, recent studies suggest that St. John's wort is of no benefit in treating major depression of moderate severity. More research is required to help us know whether St. John's wort has value in treating other forms of depression.

St. John's wort interacts with certain drugs by decreasing their effectiveness. Medications that may be affected by St. John's Wort include drugs used for the treatment of heart disease, HIV, certain cancers, depression, and seizures. There is also a danger of photosensitivity, so those taking this herb should be careful about getting too much sun (not a real problem during Iowa winters, though, is it?) Additionally, blood type research has shown that individuals with type O blood have lower levels of the enzyme monoamine oxidase (MAO). Since St. John's Wort acts like an MAO inhibitor, a category of antidepressant, some individuals with type O blood may also experience feelings of spaciness and disorientation when taking St. John's Wort, due to the ensuing low levels of MAO.

### **5-HTP**

Chemically speaking, 5-HTP is a transitional compound produced when the body converts the amino acid Tryptophan into other compounds such as Serotonin and Melatonin. Both serotonin and melatonin have been shown to decrease depressive symptoms.

Unfortunately, concerns about 5-HTP have arisen because its precursor, L-Tryptophan, was banned by the FDA in November of 1990. The FDA's decision to remove all tryptophan-containing supplements from store shelves was in response to an outbreak of Eosinophilia - Myalgia Syndrome (EMS) that was linked to the use of tryptophan. However, in later studies, the Center for Disease Control traced the cause of the EMS crisis to a contaminant found only in a few batches of tryptophan manufactured by a single Japanese company.

Some reports suggest that purity may be a potential problem for 5-HTP as well. In the September 1998 issue of the journal Nature Medicine, scientists at the Mayo Clinic reported finding low levels of impurities in retail samples of some dietary supplements containing 5-HTP. However, it's important to note that 5-HTP, in a pure form, is not a risk for EMS.

5-HTP should not be used if you have the following medical conditions: Cardiovascular Diseases; Extremely Elderly Persons; those with Parkinsons; Disease, Cancer or Autoimmune Diseases; Lung Diseases; Chronic Alcoholism; Liver diseases; parasitic infection; AIDS; Anorexia Nervosa; Low protein Diets; Severe allergies; Myalgia; Peripheral Neuropathy; Rash or Flushing; Edema; Nausea; Diarrhea; Sickle cell anemia; hemophilia; Pregnancy.

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# Holiday Stress



We are smack in the middle of the holiday season, with Chanukah starting next week, while Christmas and Kwanzaa follow a few weeks after. This time of the year has the least daylight, and it's one in which people often experience a lot of pressure.

In a departure from our usual format, we're having several of the practitioners at Eastwind Healing Center share some ideas for making this holiday season the happiest it can be and for recovering if the stress begins to take its toll. Sit back and relax for a few moments while you read our suggestions.

## Simplify your season and design new traditions:

Life Design Coach Dr. Janet Shepherd assists folks in designing more peace, passion, and fulfillment in their lives. She offers these thoughts:

"The winter/holiday season sometimes has a life of its own. We have so many expectations about the way things should be, based on our own past experiences, nostalgia, and media portrayals of happy families celebrating together. We can get caught up in the to-do lists, all the cards, and cookies, and gifts. Even more, our consumer culture urges us to spend more than we can afford. It's a good idea to take a step back from the holiday requirements and do some simplifying.

What elements of the holidays are the most enjoyable and most meaningful to you? Perhaps it's the time spent with family, the religious meaning of the holiday, or the enjoyment of holiday music. Take a moment now to notice what elements of the season feel stressful. Is it the expectation to send holiday cards? The gifts that are required? Remember, you have the opportunity to choose how you want to celebrate the holidays. Design your own holiday celebrations by choosing to participate in those traditions you love while letting others go, for this year.

Ask each family member what they love most about the holiday season and what they enjoy the least. Make it a loving and fun discussion, and design some new traditions together that will make this holiday season peaceful and heartfelt." See Janet if you'd like assistance in creating new traditions.

## It's okay to reach out for support and communicate your feelings:

Kristen Richardson, holistic Nurse Practitioner, works with individuals and families to provide the kind of healing that comes from within:

"The winter season can often be a difficult time for people emotionally. There's less sunlight, it's cold and often potentially dangerous to be out and about. There can also be fewer opportunities for interactions with others. We want the holiday season to be a happy and joyful time, but it can also be a very stressful and/or lonely time of year. Research shows that talking about your feelings, even just venting to a neutral person, can help decrease your stress level or help lift your mood. This process can be scary, embarrassing, intimidating, etc. but it's like so much else in life; once you try it, you are glad you did it. If you don't feel a connection with someone you have reached out to for support, keep looking, you will find a support person you connect well with. You don't have to be alone with how you are feeling; there are people in your community that would love to be there for you.

What does support look like? In a perfect world, we would all have a strong support system made up of family and friends that we could turn to for a shoulder to lean on. But when this is not the case, where do you go? Reaching out to an identified support person in your community is a place to start. This could be a counselor or therapist, a healthcare provider, a clergy person, and local crisis center, or a local hospital."

#### What if you suffer from Seasonal Affective Disorder?

The exact cause of Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD) is unknown, however evidence suggests it may be due to abnormalities in the sufferer's circadian rhythms and excess melatonin production. In the low-light days of fall and winter, people with SAD produce too much melatonin, which results in symptoms of depression. However, exposure to bright light through the use of a light box helps regulate circadian rhythms and suppress melatonin production, resulting in improved mood.

Light therapy has been used to treat SAD since the 1980s. This treatment can be purchased over the counter and has few related side effects. Sitting in front of a box producing high intensity light that mimics outdoor light causes a biochemical change in the brain that lifts moods. Time and consistency are required. Light therapy is most effective if used daily for anywhere between 30-120 minutes. Light boxes can be purchased online for anywhere between \$120-250. Speak with one of our psychologists about whether this treatment might be useful for the symptoms you are experiencing.

#### Other strategies for relieving holiday stress:

Acupuncture has been beneficial in helping people cope with stress for thousands of years. Stress, from a TCM perspective, can cause blockages or depletions of qi within the body. The organ system most affected is usually the Kidney energy. Acupuncture and Chinese herbal therapy can help support and restore health and functioning of the various organ systems that get affected and depleted by the stress response. See our acupuncturist, Daniela Webster, to experience this intervention.

Massage Therapy has been shown in a number of scientific studies to reduce anxiety and depressive symptoms, as well as stress hormone levels. Our bodyworkers include Joseph Mizelle, Barb Brender, Courtney Jones, Jenny Wolffe, Kristen Bergman, and Anna Evans.

### Essential Oils and Flower Essences.

Courtney Jones shares her expertise in these gentle helpers for holiday stress and winter blues:

Bach Flower Essences are liquid homeopathic remedies made from plants. They help balance the mind and emotions by resonating with one's innate self-healing mechanisms. Relief with these remedies is often instantaneous and they can be taken as needed, whenever stress or negative emotions arise.

Helpful Flower Essences for Holiday Stress and Winter Blues include: *Aspen*, for inexplicable feelings of foreboding or dread, or free-floating anxiety; *Centaury*, for those who have a hard time saying no (as in, "No, I cannot do the pie this year, I'm already bringing the ham, bread, and three sides"), and it strengthens the will; *Elm*, for the person who is stressed due to commitments piling up at work and at home; *Mustard*, for feelings of gloom and depression that descend from our of the blue; *Pine*, for those who harbor guilt, either from the past or blaming themselves for the actions of others; and *Willow*, to ease self-pity, sulking, and counting one's misfortunes.

Essential Oils are the powerful plant compounds used in Aromatherapy. They have a direct effect on the autonomic nervous system via the olfactory bulb, the cluster of brain cells at the top of the nasal cavity that relays scent information to the brain stem. Essential oils are easily absorbed through the skin, so mixing four drops in one's body lotion or in a tablespoon of vegetable oil for the bath is an ideal application. They can be used singly or in combination. For **strengthening**: Sage, Cedar, Rosewood, Patchouli; for **uplifting**: Geranium Rose, Lemongrass, Grapefruit, Sweet Orange; for **calming**: Bergamot, Lavender, Mandarin Orange, Ylang Ylang; for **clarifying**: Eucalyptus, Holy Basil, Tea Tree, Rosemary.

### Yoga for Depression:

The Yoga traditions believe that when we disconnect from something larger and fail to live up to our potential, we become depressed. So, how does yoga ease stress and depression? Dharma Singh-Khalsa, MD, author of "Meditation as Medicine," describes the way yoga can alter biochemicals in the brain. The stress hormone cortisol is reduced and the feel-good chemicals - endorphins, enkephalins, and serotonin - are increased during and after yoga. It is believed that yoga not only stimulates the nervous system, but also relaxes it at the same time. It is not uncommon for those who practice yoga to describe a "yoga buzz" which consists of feeling energized and relaxed simultaneously.

Yoga also may help depression via an increase of "self-control" that occurs when people make a commitment to this practice. People are taking action to improve their mental health, instead of being a passive recipient of a medical intervention.

Yoga helps reduce muscle stiffness and tension in the body. Because the mind and body are so intricately connected, a reduction in body stiffness results in less stiffness in the mind as well. The result is clearer thinking, improved concentration, and a greater sense of groundedness.

**Have a Wonderful Holiday Season! See you in February.**