

# COPING WITH THE HOLIDAY SEASON

SOURCE: [www.medicinenet.com](http://www.medicinenet.com)

The holiday season for most people is a fun time of the year filled with parties, celebrations and social gatherings with family and friends. For many people, it is a time filled with sadness, self-reflection, loneliness, and anxiety.

## What causes holiday blues?

Sadness is a truly personal feeling. What makes one person feel sad may not affect another person. Typical sources of holiday sadness include:

- Stress
- Fatigue
- Unrealistic expectations
- Over-commercialization
- Financial stress
- The inability to be with one's family and friends

Balancing the demands of shopping, parties, family obligations, and house guests may contribute to feelings of being overwhelmed and increased tension. People who do not view themselves as depressed may develop stress responses such as:

- Headaches
- Excessive drinking
- Over-eating
- Insomnia

Others may experience post-holiday sadness after New Year's or January 1<sup>st</sup>. This can result from built-up expectations, disappointments from the previous year, coupled with stress and fatigue.

Tips for coping with holiday stress and depression:

- Make realistic expectations for the holiday season.
- Set realistic goals for yourself
- Pace yourself. Do not take on more responsibilities than you can handle.
- Make a list and prioritize the important activities. This can help make holiday tasks more manageable.
- Be realistic about what you can and cannot do.
- Do not put all your energy into just one day (i.e., Christmas Day, New Year's Eve, etc.) The holiday cheer can be spread from one holiday event to the next.
- If you are lonely, why not try volunteering some time to help others.
- Find holiday activities that are free, such as looking at holiday decorations, going window shopping without buying and watching the winter weather whether it's a snowflake, or a raindrop.
- Limit your drinking since excessive drinking will only increase your feelings of depression.
- Try something new. Celebrate the holidays in a new way.
- Spend some time with supportive and caring people.
- Reach out and make new friends.
- Make time to contact a long-lost friend or relative and spread some holiday cheer.
- Make time for yourself!
- Let others share the responsibilities of holiday tasks.
- Keep track of your holiday spending. Over-spending can lead to depression when the bills arrive after the holidays are over. Extra bills with little budget to pay





for them can lead to further stress and depression.

Is the environment and reduced daylight a factor in wintertime sadness? Animals react to the changing season with changes in mood and behavior. People change behaviors as well when there is less sunlight. Most people find they eat and sleep slightly more in wintertime and dislike the dark mornings and short days. For some, however, symptoms are severe enough to disrupt their lives and to cause considerable distress. These people are suffering from Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD). Research studies have found phototherapy is effective in treating people that suffer from SAD. Phototherapy is a treatment involving a few hours of exposure to intense light.

