

# HOLIDAY DEPRESSION AND STRESS

Although the holidays are supposed to be a time full of joy, good cheer and optimistic hopes for a new year, many people experience seasonal 'blues'. The holiday season is a time full of parties and family gatherings, but for many people, it is also a time of self-evaluation, loneliness, reflection on past 'failures', and anxiety about an uncertain future.

The 'holiday blues' can be caused by many factors: increased stress and fatigue, unrealistic expectations, over-commercialization, the inability to be with one's family. The increased demands of shopping, parties, family reunions, and houseguests also contribute to these feelings of tension. Even people who do not become depressed can develop other stress reactions during the holidays such as headaches, excessive drinking, over-eating, and difficulty sleeping.

Recent studies have shown that there are also environmental factors that can contribute to feelings of depression around the holidays. Some people suffer from Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD) that can result from exposure to fewer hours of sunlight as the days grow shorter during the winter months. Researchers found, however, that light therapy, a treatment involving exposure to intense light, is effective in relieving depressive symptoms in patients with SAD.

Although many people become depressed during the holiday season, even more respond to the excessive stress and anxiety once the holidays have passed. This post-holiday let down after January 1 can be the result of emotional disappointments experienced during the preceding months as well as the

physical reactions caused by excess fatigue and stress.

## Act challenge

What frustrations did you suffer during last year's holiday season? How will you avoid them this year? Take some time to consider these questions, write down your answers, and take action to make your holidays more meaningful and memorable. Involve family and friends by asking them to join you in exchanging ideas.

- 🧠 Keep expectations for the holiday season manageable by not trying to make the holiday 'the best ever'.
- 🧠 Try to set realistic goals for yourself. Pace yourself. Organize your time.
- 🧠 Make a list and prioritize the most important activities.
- 🧠 Be realistic about what you can and cannot do. Do not spend too much time preparing for just one day (Christmas).
- 🧠 Remember that the holiday season does not automatically banish reasons for feeling sad or lonely. There is room for these feelings to be present, even if the person chooses not to express them.
- 🧠 Think quality, not quantity.
- 🧠 Don't be disappointed if your holidays are not like they used to be. Life brings changes. Each holiday season is different and can be enjoyed in its' own way. You set yourself up for sadness if everything must be just like the "good old days." Look toward to the future.
- 🧠 Shop early. If you exchange gifts with others, set a firm date by which you'll complete your shopping so you can avoid any last-minute rushing that leaves you feeling exhausted and resentful. That way





you can purchase your gifts with a feeling of love and generosity instead of frustrated obligation.

- 🗨️ Invite family and friends to replace gifts with quality time spent together or joint donations to those in need. Many of us feel like we already have too much stuff as it is, so why add more? If you make this suggestion early and agree to forgo gift buying, just imagine how much more quality time you'd have to spend with each other.
- 🗨️ Enjoy holiday activities that are free such as driving around to look at Christmas decorations. Go window-shopping without buying anything.
- 🗨️ Don't over commit. Before you agree to bake cookies, attend parties, or volunteer at your child's school, take a deep breath and ask yourself the following question: "Do I really, really want to do this?" Let family and friends know now that you'll be limiting your commitments this year so you can enjoy the holidays. By doing so, you not only make saying "no" easier, but you might also inspire them to do the same.
- 🗨️ Don't drink too much. Excessive drinking will only make you more depressed.
- 🗨️ Get the decorations up early. If your holiday involves decorations, don't set yourself up to

feel angry or frustrated while trimming the tree or putting up lights. Schedule time now to enjoy the process of creating festive beauty.

- 🗨️ Don't be afraid to try something new. Celebrate the holidays in a way you have not done before.
- 🗨️ Do something for someone else. It is an old remedy, but it can help; Many people say that they've always wanted to donate their time at a soup kitchen or to serve those in need in some way. Don't wait until the last minute to make your plans. By offering your time now, you not only insure a more meaningful holiday, but you also give needy organizations room to breathe by knowing that their needs have been met ahead of schedule.
- 🗨️ Spend time with people who are supportive and care about you. Make new friends if you are alone during special times. Contact someone with whom you have lost touch.
- 🗨️ Don't spend all your time providing activities for your family and friends.

### **FIND TIME FOR YOURSELF!**

"Self-help works."

