

HOLIDAY DEPRESSION AND STRESS

By Mental Health America

The holiday season can be a time full of joy, cheer, parties and family gatherings. But for many people, it is a time of loneliness, reflection on past failures and anxiety about an uncertain future.

What Causes Holiday Blues?

Many factors can cause the “holiday blues”: stress, fatigue, unrealistic expectations, over-commercialization, financial problems, and the inability to be with one’s family and friends. The demands of shopping, parties, family reunions and house guests also contribute to feelings of tension. People may also develop other stress responses such as headaches, excessive drinking, over-eating and difficulty sleeping. Even more people experience post-holiday let down after January 1. This can result from disappointments during the preceding months compounded by the excess fatigue and stress.

Coping with Stress & Depression During the Holidays

- Keep expectations for the holiday season manageable. Try to set realistic goals. Pace yourself. Organize your time. Make a list and prioritize the important activities.
- Be realistic about what you can and cannot do. Don’t put the entire focus on just one. Remember that it’s a season of holiday sentiment, and activities can be spread out to lessen stress and increase enjoyment.
- Remember the holiday season does not 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.
- Leave “yesteryear” in the past and look toward the future. Life brings changes. Each season is different and can be enjoyed in its own way. Don’t set yourself up in comparing today with the “good ol’ days.”
- Do something for someone else. Try volunteering some of your time to help others.
- Enjoy activities that are free, such as taking a drive to look at holiday decorations, going window shopping or making a snowperson with children.
- Be aware that excessive drinking will only increase your feelings of depression.
- Try something new. Celebrate the holidays in a new way.
- Spend time with supportive and caring people. Reach out and make new friends, or contact someone you haven’t heard from in a while.
- Save time for yourself! Recharge your batteries! Let others share in the responsibility of planning activities.

If you or someone you know is in crisis now, seek help immediately. Call 1-800-273-TALK (8255) to reach a 24 hour crisis center or dial 911 for immediate assistance.