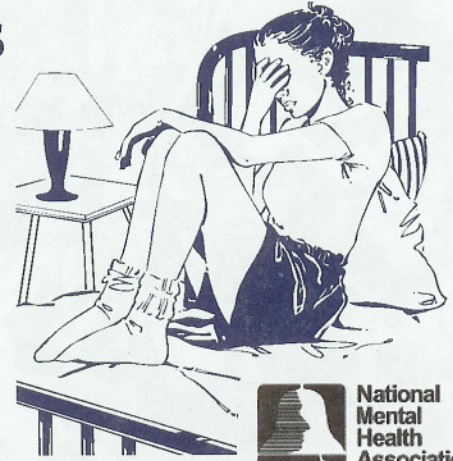


Holiday Depression & Stress

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

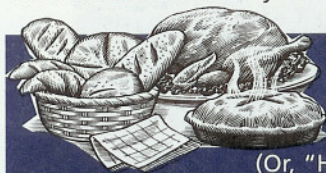
What Causes Holiday Blues?

Many factors can cause the "holiday blues": stress, fatigue, unrealistic expectations, over-commercialization, financial constraints, and the inability to be with one's family and friends. The demands of shopping, parties, family reunions, and houseguests also contribute to feelings of tension. People who do not become depressed may 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 with the excess fatigue and stress.



Coping with Stress and Depression During the Holidays

Keep expectations for the holiday season manageable. Try to set realistic goals for yourself. 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 entire focus on just one day (i.e., Thanksgiving Day). Remember it is a season of holiday sentiment and activities can be spread out (time-wise) 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 time to help others. Enjoy activities that are free, such as driving around to look at holiday decorations; going window-shopping without buying; 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 have not heard from for awhile. Save time for yourself! Recharge your batteries! Let others share responsibility of activities.



HOLIDAY TIPS:



(Or, "How can I get through the holidays, and not become a victim of seasonal stress?")

With these ten tips, you can de-stress your holidays and enjoy them more. May this holiday season be the best ever!!

1. Plan Ahead. Before the rush begins, get a good calendar or organizer and mark off activities to complete, with the dates you plan to do them.
2. Create a Budget. 'Tis the season to buy, when shoppers fight one another in droves at the malls. Try shopping creatively, or ahead of time, for bargains. Consider making gifts that have the personal touch (and cost less).
3. Take care of your body. Get enough sleep and eat nutritiously. Avoid alcohol when possible, and cut down on caffeine and nicotine.
4. Don't forget exercise. Exercise is a known stress reliever, depression alleviator, and can help combat the holiday "battle of the bulge".
5. Keep realistic expectations. Don't worry about having the "perfect party" or the "perfect tree". It's okay to make mistakes. Forgiveness and a realistic attitude can go a long way towards making holidays less stressful for all.
6. Acknowledge how you feel. If you and your family are dealing with loss, or separation, discuss how you feel, or give yourself permission to have a good cry, if needed, which can reduce emotional stress. This is the time to reach out for support, to listen to one another, instead of repressing feelings, which can increase tension.
7. Do something for others. Many organizations are desperate for
8. Do something fun. Do something that you and your family really enjoy. Grab some "down time", put your feet in a hot bath, light a scented candle, listen to your favorite music, or read an uplifting book.
9. Breathe deeply. When the day is full, and the evening looks even more hectic, take a minute to breathe slowly from your abdomen. These are called "cleansing breaths" and deliver oxygen to your body, which relieves tension.
10. Laugh. Laughter shared with family members is even more fun, and can help everyone relax a little.

BUDGETING:

Now through the New Year



Step 1 **Make a list**

Take a tip from Santa: make a list and check it twice. Does everyone belong on this list? Be discerning. Divide your list into A and B, a master list of everyone and a second list for those who get something special. Stick to the list.

Step 2 **Set Limits**

As you're making your list, write down a maximum dollar limit for everyone, and keep track of how much you actually spend. Stick to it.

Step 3 **Buy in Bulk**

Plan to have some extras on hand by investing in some simple gifts anyone would enjoy. There's always someone who you may want to surprise with something special. Buy in bulk: a case of wine, elegant candles, or tins of homemade cookies.

Step 4 **Be Realistic**

Ask yourself: is that maximum amount you figured in Step 2 really something you can afford? Since debt doesn't do your credit rating any good, get creative about ways to save.

Step 5 **Trim your Expenses**

Revisit the list: should it be smaller? Could you make some of those presents yourself? Could you have a gift exchange in a larger group instead of having to buy multiple gifts?

Step 6 **Stick to the List**

This is the toughest part: use cash. It makes it harder to spend more than what you have. Or, use your debit card instead of your credit card. No surprises after the holiday season!

Step 7 **Start Getting Ready for Next Year**

After each holiday, there are always post-holiday sales to take advantage of. Prices get cut by as much as 75%. Take this time to stock up on wrapping paper, cards, decorations, etc...

CONSIDER THIS:

GIVING A GIFT CAN BE AS SIMPLE AS GIVING SOMEONE A SMILE.
PRACTICE GIVING ALL YEAR LONG!!!!



Employee Assistance Program encourages early intervention for all problems or issues before they begin to interfere with job performance and life in general.

EAP benefits include:

- ✓ 24-hour access
- ✓ Diverse network of EAP providers
- ✓ EAP assessment
- ✓ Coordinated referral and follow-up
- ✓ Short-term confidential EAP counseling
- ✓ Supervisor referral system
- ✓ Managers and supervisors consultation
- ✓ Wellness training seminars
- ✓ Critical incident assistance

24-Hour Access to Employee Assistance is available
Phone (225) 765-7874 or Toll Free (800) 245-8332

If you have any questions about the EAP program please contact your Human Resources Department.

If you have any questions or comments on this newsletter please contact Ann Tranchina, MSW, at FMC, (225) 215-2120