

Battling Holiday Depression and Stress

Suggestions for having an enjoyable festive season

While some people may anxiously anticipate holiday parties, cookie exchanges, wrapping gifts and family gatherings all year, others dread the holiday season. In fact, the obligations that accompany this time of year, coupled with tense family drama, can make anyone a real Grinch.

In addition, holiday-related stress and depression can cause headaches, excessive alcohol consumption, overeating and insomnia. To combat these side effects, it is best to identify the cause of stress and then take the necessary steps to rectify them.

Causes of Stress

As the holidays come near, ask yourself what exactly about the season gets you down. Stress may be triggered by the following:

- Unhappy memories from your childhood, the loss of a loved one or a previous depression
- Relatives that are particularly difficult

- Reflecting on the ways in which life has negatively changed over the course of the year, such as a divorce, death in the family or family member enlisting in the military
- The monotony of the season – seeing the same faces, eating the same food, going through the same motions
- Lowered immune defenses because of cooler temperatures, high incidence of the flu, and eating more and sleeping less
- Financial stress in a hard economy.

Ways to Minimize or Avoid Holiday Stress

- Do not feel as though you must meet all family obligations. Draw up a list of the reasons why you used to engage in various holiday traditions. Then, make a list of the reasons that you should partake in them this year. This will make it clearer as to what events you should avoid and what to join in on. The bottom line: do not simply do something or go somewhere because you have always done it in the past, especially if it makes you miserable.

- Ask others for assistance if your normal duties are too much. For instance, ask one of your siblings to host that family dinner, or make it a potluck and have everyone contribute to the meal.
- Make realistic expectations for the season.
- Make list of priorities that you must accomplish and put them in chronological order so you do not become too overwhelmed.
- Do not place all your energy into just one day – get excited for the entire season and what it has to offer.
- Enjoy the present and try not



to worry about sad memories and what may be lacking.

- Look on to the future with optimism.
- Do not compare today's moments with yesterday's memories.
- Consider volunteering to help others, especially if you feel lonely.
- Engage in free holiday-related activities such as window shopping, looking at holiday decoration displays, watching winter weather or taking a stroll in the snow with a friend.
- Limit your alcohol intake.
- Stay active and continue to exercise, and eat healthy.
- Create a new tradition.
- Spend time with caring, compassionate people.
- Make new friends and try to connect with old friends that you haven't seen in a long time.
- Make time for yourself and your needs.
- Keep tabs on your holiday spending. Make a budget and stick to it, no exceptions.
- Learn to say no. It's O.K. not to do everything.

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Did you know...?

Your mood may take a turn for the worst near the holidays, but it may not have much to do with the season itself. When there is less sunlight, some suffer from Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD). If you feel down and stressed, consider talking to your doctor or a counselor for some much-needed relief.

