

Coping with the Holidays

The holiday season brings celebrations, social gatherings and joy, but for some the holidays are a time of isolation, sadness, and anxiety. There are many reasons for negative feelings and thoughts including frantic activities, financial constraints and the inability to be with one's family or friends. The holidays often bring about unrealistic expectations about the perfect family or perfect holiday celebration. The holiday season can also be a time of self-reflection. As the year nears its end many people focus on past losses. Coping with sadness from the built-up expectations and disappointments from the year coupled with the stress of holiday activities often leads to fatigue, depression and anxiety.

There are a few rules that can help us prevent the holiday blues.

- **Be Realistic.** The holidays don't have to be perfect or just like previous years. Make your own traditions- as families and circumstances change expectations must change and should be reasonable and achievable. Keep it simple and relax.
- **Recognize and acknowledge your feelings.** If you are sad because you can't travel to loved ones or someone close to you recently died it is normal to grieve and feel sad. Express your feelings. Don't try to force yourself to be happy just because it's the holidays.
- **Make a list and stick to your budget.** Before shopping, decide how much you can afford, make a list and stick to it. Don't try to buy happiness or find that perfect gift.
- **Just say no.** Saying yes when you know you can't handle another thing will only make you feel resentful and overwhelmed.
- **Surround yourself with positive, supportive people.** If at all possible, avoid people that tend to leave you feeling angry and drained. If you must spend time with them try to accept them as they are, even if they don't live up to your expectations. Set aside differences and save stressful discussions for another time. Be understanding when tempers flare and remember others may be feeling the stress and fatigue of the holidays.
- **Lose yourself in service to others.** This might be volunteering. It could mean visiting a friend that needs some support or taking a plate of holiday food to a neighbor. Reaching out to others will lift your spirits and expand your friendships.
- **Remember to "SEE".** Sleeping regularly, Eating healthy and Exercising. Get 7-9 hours of sleep a night, plan ahead for meals, limit sugar and fat, and don't abandon your exercise. Exercise helps relieve stress and burn extra calories. Remember that overeating often leads to more stress and guilt. Avoid excessive alcohol as it will only increase sadness and depression.
- **Increase your support.** If you go to AA meetings, yoga classes or therapy once a week, increase it to two times a week. If you find yourself feeling persistently sad, hopeless, unable to sleep, sleeping too much, turning to alcohol or drugs, and unable to accomplish daily tasks, you may need professional help. Talk to your healthcare professional.
- **Take a break.** Have some "alone" time. Even 15 minutes of quiet time can help you relax and feel refreshed. Take a walk, listen to music, take a bubble bath or read a good book.

Don't be infected by the holiday stress bug. Take steps now by planning and positive thinking to avoid holiday stress and depression. Don't forget to laugh; humor will improve your physical, emotional and spiritual health.

Enjoy a tranquil, healthy holiday season and a happy, adventurous new year.