

BEATING THE HOLIDAY BLUES

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- Although the holidays are supposed to be a time of joy, good cheer and high hopes for the new year, many people experience holiday “blues”
- Holiday blues can be caused by increased stress and fatigue, unrealistic expectations and the inability to be with one’s family, the increased demands of shopping, parties, and family reunions
- Holiday depression is common and some studies have shown that approximately 25% of the population suffers from it to some degree or another
- The holiday blues, as the name implies, tends to be temporary and seasonal, as opposed to depression, which is longer lasting and may require treatment —still the holidays can be difficult for many people
- Problems and/or emotions repressed during other months often tend to surface during the holidays
- Factors that commonly contribute to the holiday blues tend to fall into three (3) categories:

1. *Psychological:*

- You may be facing your first holiday without your spouse or a loved one which can cause great feelings of sadness and loneliness
- In addition, if you are already feeling depressed or isolated, seeing others having a good time may make matters worse
- Family misunderstandings and conflicts can also develop at this time of the year
- There may be strained relationships between family members that commonly cause feelings of uneasiness when everyone gets together
- You may expect too much from the holidays – that picture-perfect celebration, expensive gifts or hearing from a long-lost friend and then become disappointed when these expectations fall short

2. ***Financial:***

- The holidays bring with them an added financial burden --you may not have as much money to buy gifts or holiday clothes this year
- Or you may spend more than you can afford to

3. ***Physical:***

- The strain of shopping, attending social gatherings and baking holiday goodies can make you tense and fatigued
- Too much food and drink during the holidays can also cause weight gain, which can be frustrating if you are trying to lose weight

Keeping the blues at bay:

- To help prevent the season's stresses from ruining your holidays, follow these important strategies:

1. ***Acknowledge your feelings:***

- If you've recently had a loss in the family or are separated from loved ones, realize that it's okay and normal to feel sadness and grief
- by repressing your feelings of sadness, they will only last longer

2. ***Seek support:***

- Take advantage of social support
- If you are feeling isolated or down, seek out community, religious or social services that can provide you with support and companionship
- Get involved in a community project as this may help in lifting your spirits

3. ***Be realistic:***

- As families change and grow, traditions may need to change as well
- Hold on to those family rituals if you still can – a special food or holiday activity – but understand that some traditions may no longer be possible

- Try to not set your expectations too high – those holiday gatherings portrayed in pictures and the media generally are not representative of most families

4. ***Set aside differences:***

- Try to accept family members as they are
- Leave old grievances or discussions about differences until a more appropriate time

5. ***Plan ahead:***

- Develop a calendar of specific days for shopping, baking, visiting friends and other events
- Do not plan more than you can comfortably accomplish and schedule time for some solitude and relaxation
- If you are feeling stressed and/or overburdened, discuss sharing responsibilities with other family members or friends

6. ***Don't abandon healthy habits:***

- Don't feel pressured to eat or drink more than you're accustomed to just because it's the holiday season