Holiday Depression

If you feel more depressed than normal for an extended period following the holidays, do not be afraid to seek help from a professional. Try reaching out to loved ones and friends for support, and learn ways to cope with the feelings you are experiencing.

For many people, feeling a little down after the holidays is normal. Once all the decorating, gift-giving, family gatherings and merrymaking are over, a letdown may occur. For kids, this time means returning to school after the holiday break. For adults, it can mean struggling through the darker, colder winter months and paying off holiday bills.

Why We May Feel Depressed After the Holidays

If you feel down once the holidays have come and gone, you are not alone. Thousands of people experience bouts of stress and winter depression that linger past the holiday season. Common symptoms may include:

- Lack of energy
- Lack of interest in pleasurable activities
- Decreased sex drive
- Difficulty concentrating
- Increase in sleep and sleepiness
- Increased appetite or lack of interest in eating
- Social avoidance
- Substance abuse

Many mental and physiological factors may be causing these symptoms, including:

- **Unrealized expectations.** It is natural to feel somewhat pressured before and during the holidays: pressure to buy the perfect gifts for others, to expect the perfect gifts for yourself, to keep family and friends entertained, and to get in the spirit of the season. You may also feel pressure to make New Year's resolutions that can be difficult to keep. If you do not meet these expectations, you may feel disappointed.

- **Negative associations with the holidays.** Many people do not look forward to the holidays because the season reminds them of something painful. Perhaps your parent, spouse or other loved one passed away recently; the holidays can be an emotional reminder of your loss. Perhaps you dread spending time with certain relatives. These negative feelings often can last beyond the holidays.

- **Anticlimactic feelings.** It is difficult to top the warmhearted emotions we often experience during the holiday season. Once all the festivities have ended, the presents have been exchanged and your

holiday time off has passed, it is easy to feel a bit melancholy. It may be a long way off until your next holiday or vacation, and the end-of-the-year holidays are another year away.

- **Biological reactions to seasonal changes.** Research indicates that lack of sunlight, a hallmark of the winter months in many parts of the world, can disrupt brain hormones and circadian rhythms, which control your body's biological clock. Some scientists believe lack of sunlight may cause an imbalance of neurotransmitters, especially serotonin and dopamine, and that some people have reduced retinal light sensitivity in the darker months. People susceptible to these factors may develop seasonal affective disorder (SAD), a form of depression that commonly begins in early fall and subsides in early spring. Over these darker, typically colder months in which there is less sunlight, people with SAD often experience a range of symptoms that may include feelings of depression and lack of energy. SAD may be linked to hormone and biological clock imbalances. Experts theorize that people with SAD have biological clocks that may run slower in the winter months.

Coping Tips

Try these suggestions to help manage your feelings of depression during and after the holidays:

- **Talk to a professional.** If these feelings linger for several weeks and are interfering with your ability to enjoy life and function effectively, seek help. A therapist can assist you in exploring your feelings.
- **Find support in others.** Try confiding in trusted family members and friends about how you have been feeling. Be honest with others about what you are experiencing instead of covering up your emotions. An understanding loved one can give you the strength and support you need to help cope with depressive feelings.
- **Manage your stress.** Learn effective ways to reduce your stress and anxiety, which may minimize your feelings of depression.
- **Exercise regularly.** Regular fitness activities can improve your mood and boost your self-esteem. Talk to your doctor about an exercise program that is right for you. Because a lack of sunlight may be contributing to your depression, exercise outdoors for a double benefit.
- **Eat right.** Discipline yourself not to overeat. Avoid junk foods and environments that may encourage bingeing. Stick to a nutritionally balanced diet. Avoid alcohol, which is a depressant.
- **Get the proper amount of sleep.** Experts recommend at least seven to eight hours a night. Resist the urge to oversleep, and try to maintain a regular sleeping schedule.
- **Make more time for recreational, fun activities.** Try to spend more time outdoors, especially on sunny days. Consider taking a vacation soon, perhaps to a bright, warm climate.
- **Be more social. Stay in touch with friends and family.** Get out more often, and participate in enjoyable activities such as attending social gatherings, seeing movies and having lunch or dinner with friends.
- **Consider using a lightbox.** These devices have been used successfully to treat SAD. Talk with your doctor or therapist about whether the increased amount of light could be helpful to you.

- **Educate yourself.** Learn all you can about depression, support groups in your area and ways to manage your feelings.

Do not let feelings of depression and sadness control your life. Get help to manage your symptoms. Learn to feel comfortable talking about your difficult emotions. Take care of your mind and body by giving them the food, rest and activity they need. Do not be afraid to treat yourself to the things you enjoy more often. Aim to experience life to the fullest.

Resources

- National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH): www.nimh.nih.gov
- National Institutes of Health (NIH): http://health.nih.gov
- Mental Health America: www.nmha.org

Here when you need us.

Call: 844-207-5465

Online: guidanceresources.com

App: GuidanceNow SM

Web ID: LivingME

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