

“Do you have the Holiday Blues?” What to do about it and Strategies for How to Cope!

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Not everyone shares in the celebration and joy associated with the holidays. Many people feel stressed and unhappy in response to the demands of shopping for gifts, spending large amounts of money, attending parties, hosting family gatherings and entertaining houseguests. It is not uncommon to react to these stresses with excessive drinking and eating, having difficulty sleeping, and experiencing physical complaints. The holiday blues are a common result. If you experience reactions like these during the holidays, you are not alone. Let's take a look at what causes the “Holiday Blues” and what you can do about them.

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One basic element is the fear of disappointing loved ones and others. Even though individuals can't afford to spend a lot of money on presents, many people feel so obligated to come through with an elaborate gift that they spend more than they can afford. Another common cause is that people at times believe that the giving of gifts actually improves relationships. Giving someone a nice present won't necessarily strengthen a friendship or romantic relationship. When your gifts don't produce the reactions you had hoped for, you may feel let down.

It is also the time of year that hits you hardest if someone important to you passed away or left you during a past holiday season. You may become depressed as the anniversary approaches and thinking of the holidays without this person can be overwhelming.

For some families, the holidays are times of chaos and confusion. If this was your experience, you may carry memories of the disappointment and upheaval that came with the holidays. Even though things may be better now, it is difficult to forget the times when your holidays were ruined by family dysfunction.

Strategies for Dealing with the Holiday Blues

While the holiday blues are usually temporary, these



ideas can help make this year's holiday experience more pleasant and less stressful.

Be realistic. Don't expect the holiday season to solve all past problems. The forced cheerfulness of this time of year cannot ward off sadness or loneliness.

Drink less alcohol. Even though drinking alcohol gives you a temporary feeling of well-being, it is a depressant and never makes anything better.

Give yourself permission not to feel cheerful. Accept how you are feeling. If you have recently experienced a loss, you can't expect yourself to put on a happy face. Tell others how you are feeling and what you need.

Have a spending limit and stick to it. Look for activities that are free, such as driving around to look at holiday decorations. Find ways to show people you care without spending a lot.

Be honest. Express your feelings to those around you in a constructive, honest, and open way. If you need to confront someone with a problem, begin your sentences with "I feel."

Look for sources of support. Learn about programs at health centers and houses of worship. Many of these have special support groups, workshops and other activities designed to help people deal with the holiday blues.

Give yourself special care. Schedule times to relax and be pampered. Do things to make you feel good about being you.



Set limits and priorities. Be realistic about what you will be able to accomplish. Prepare a To-Do list to help you arrange your priorities.

Volunteer your time. If you are troubled because you won't be seeing your family, volunteer to work at a hospital or food bank. Volunteering can help raise your spirits by turning your focus to people who are less fortunate than you are.

Get some exercise. Exercise has a positive impact on depression because it boosts serotonin levels. Try to get some type of exercise at least twice each week.

For some people, holiday blues continue into the New Year. This is often caused by leftover feelings of disappointment during the holiday season and being physically exhausted. The blues also happen for some people because the start of a New Year is a time of reflection, which can produce anxiety. Clinical depression is more than just feeling sad for a few weeks and may require professional treatment. The symptoms generally include changes in appetite and sleep patterns, having less interest in daily activities, experiencing difficulty concentrating, and having a general feeling of hopelessness. If you are concerned that a friend or relative may be suffering from more than just holiday blues, you should express your concerns. If the person expresses thoughts of worthlessness or suicide, it is important to seek the help of a qualified mental health professional.

Dr. Sandi Reiken is a Clinical Psychologist with over 25 years experience treating patients. Her group of compassionate therapists will thoroughly evaluate your issues and use their extensive training and experience to facilitate your treatment. They determine an appropriate course of action that responds to the issue, crisis, or conflict that you are facing. Dr. Sandi Reiken and Associates are located in Montville, NJ. For more information, call 973-808-0038, or visit their Web site at: dreihekenandassociates.com.

