

# Help for the Holiday Blues



The holidays are just about here again. And with them can come a range of stresses and anxieties, among them: holiday shopping, holiday finances, family stress, mailing seasonal cards, attending parties and the tendency to neglect everyday routines at this time of year — such as eating right and exercising. These can lead to the phenomenon known as holiday depression or the holiday blues.

## Will Your Holiday Be Blue?

According to the National Mental Health Association (NMHA), depression peaks over the holidays. The unrealistic expectations of the season, time and financial pressures, missing loved ones and reflecting on past events as the year comes to an end all contribute.

During the holidays, a person can experience depression, loneliness, sadness, isolation, anger and abnormal sleep. Those who don't experience depression can experience other symptoms such as headaches, tension, fatigue, excessive drinking and over-eating.

It is also common to feel a holiday let down after the holidays are over. The hectic holiday period, and the feeling of being physically and emotionally drained can leave you with the sense of loss or frustration, and then that can turn into the blues.

The holiday blues can range from mild sadness during the holidays to severe depression, and they are often a normal reaction to life situations.

## Disagreement Over the Term

The holiday blues are not a diagnosable clinical disorder. In fact, there is no agreement among mental health experts as to whether the phenomenon actually exists, because there is no increase in the number of people who seek mental health services in November and December.

Holiday blues should not be confused with clinical depression. Clinical depression is a disorder that may need to be relieved with medication, while the holiday blues could require something as simple as a good listener. Clinical depression, however, can be triggered in a number of ways at or just after the holidays.

There is also a tendency to link the holiday blues with seasonal affective disorder (SAD). SAD, however, is a diagnosable disorder that is caused by fewer hours of sunlight during the winter. Although people with the holiday blues can also be afflicted with SAD, the two are not directly related. Patients with SAD suffer the symptoms not only throughout the holiday season, but also throughout the autumn and winter seasons.

## Keeping the Blues Away

The holiday blues may be alleviated with something as simple as getting enough rest. People actually lose sleep during the holidays and end up shortchanging themselves, so the brain needs to recuperate. Consequences of not getting enough sleep might be cloudy thinking, irritability and inability to deal with everyday stress.

Other ways to help ease the blues are to eat a diet rich in fruits and vegetables and to start exercising. Also, make an effort to be more positive.

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# Help for the Holiday Blues (continued)

## Tips to Ease the Blues

If you are experiencing holiday blues, try to decrease or alleviate them by doing these things:

- Talk to someone honestly.
- Limit alcohol intake.
- Stick within your normal life routine as much as possible.
- Stick to a realistic budget.
- Establish realistic goals and expectations.
- Do not label the season as a time to cure past problems.
- Find time for yourself.
- Enjoy free holiday activities.
- Try to celebrate the holiday in a different way

The holiday blues can be quite common, but if you are feeling especially down — for example, your sleep or your appetite is affected, contact your regular physician or visit the National Mental Health Association online at [www.nmha.org](http://www.nmha.org) for help and guidance. If you are thinking about suicide, call your health care provider immediately.

