

Stop Those Holiday Blues !!

What Causes Holiday Blues?

Many factors can cause the “holiday blues”: environmental stress, loss of loved ones, fatigue, unrealistic expectations, wanting the “perfect holiday,” over-commercialization, financial constraints, work pressures, depression, anxiety, or the inability to be with one’s family and friends. Some individuals may suffer from Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD), which results from fewer hours of sunlight as the days grow shorter during the winter months.

Phototherapy, a treatment involving a few hours of exposure to intense light, is effective in relieving depressive symptoms in patients with SAD. Other factors that may contribute to the “holiday blues” are the demands of added house guests, extra shopping, increased traffic in stores, parties, or additional activities. People may become depressed, develop unhealthy coping strategies, or develop physical symptoms. People may exhibit headaches, muscle aches and pains, excessive drinking, fatigue, irritability, over-eating, and difficulty sleeping. Some individuals experience post-holiday let-down after January 1. This can result from disappointments during the preceding months compounded with the excess fatigue and stress. Regardless of the symptoms or causes of the “holiday blues,” we have some suggestions that may help you to learn to truly enjoy this time of year again—or for the very first time.

Reduce those expectations of yourself and others. Think about what you really want to do. You don't have to do everything.

Talk to someone positive and supportive regarding how you feel about the holidays.

Leave the past behind and start a new tradition this year.

Do something nice for someone else and don't tell them.

Enjoy activities that are free. It's fun and will save you money.

Remember drinking alcohol increases your feelings of depression and those holiday blues. So stay alcohol free.

Try something positive and new.

Increase time spent with supportive and new people.

Save time for yourself.

Listen to a meditation tape.

Go for a walk or exercise to recharge your batteries.

Remember past years of over eating and eating too many foods that were full of sugar and carbohydrates, feeling sluggish, and gaining weight. This holiday season eat balanced meals. You will feel much better and have much more energy if you stick with protein, fruits, and vegetables.

Sit by a window and read or watch T.V. That extra sunlight shining on you will feel good.

Remember it is O.K. and healthy to say "No."

Instead of buying a gift, give someone a card saying what you will do for them.

Remember balance will help you feel centered and calm. Take time to breathe deeply. This will help restore your inner peace.

You have choices and control the direction of your life. Think through what you say "Yes" to. You can make choices about what you eat, what you drink, what social events you attend, how much money you spend, what friends or family to visit, just to name a few.

Get plenty of rest and sleep. Staying up late to get more done will only make you tired. Pace yourself.

Remember to stay present in the moment. Ask yourself, "Am I fully experiencing what I'm doing?"

It's easy to become lost in negative feelings or that one thing that went wrong. Instead, focus on the things you are grateful for each day. Notice what is going right in your life today.

Take time out for the things you enjoy.

Be courageous and stay within your values or goals. Maybe you would rather call friends than send out cards. Maybe you would rather have a potluck instead of a busy and fancy sit-down meal.

Ask for help. It is easier to solve a problem and get more done when working with another person.

Don't expect others to read your mind. Tell them what you need.

Let go of muscle tension. Stress is stored in the body and turns into muscle pain, headaches, anxiety, backache, etc. Take a slow, deep breath right now and release it slowly.

Do muscle relaxation exercises.

If you are going to attend a stressful family gathering or party, have a way to leave: drive yourself, arrange to have a friend ready to get you, go for a walk outside, or attend when Dial-a-Ride is running.

Journal or write your feelings on paper.

Wrap gifts in comic paper or hand-decorated brown bags from the grocery store. This will be fun and cost less money.

Create new positive memories to replace the old stressful memories.

This will take time, but will be worth it.

Focus on a positive statement throughout the season. For instance, "I will have fun this year," or "I can do things differently," or "I can do this." Post this on your refrigerator, mirror, or door.

Write down on paper and practice what you will say and do during those difficult situations.

Remember feelings are just feelings and will pass.

Volunteer.

Surround yourself with positive people, activities, etc.

Remember don't assume you know what others are saying or thinking about you. Instead check out your fears and thoughts with your support systems.

Try aromatherapy. Put a cinnamon stick in hot water. Buy a scented candle or flowers.

Find something to laugh about. Humor is a wonderful stress reliever.

Remember you can do these things!! Stay positive!

Seek Counseling—nothing like a little added support to help you get through the "holiday blues."

By: Bonnie J. Milledge, M.A., L.P.C., L.B.S.W., C.A.C-1