

The Clinical Corner

with Maggie Caesar-Myers
Glade Run Lutheran Services



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Holiday Depression?

The holiday season is a time full of joy, cheer, parties, and family gatherings. However, for many people, it is a time of self-evaluation, loneliness, reflection on past failures, and anxiety about an uncertain future, often called “holiday blues.” People may struggle during the holidays because expectations are high and routines may be disrupted. The holidays can present an overwhelming array of demands — cooking meals, shopping, baking, cleaning and entertaining, to name just a few. And if COVID-19 is spreading in your community, you may be feeling additional stress, or you may be worrying about you and your loved ones' health. You may also feel frustrated, sad or anxious because your holiday plans may look different during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Many people wonder if they are experiencing an episode of depression or if it is holiday blues. Holiday blues can be described as a passing mood of the season which typically lifts after the holiday season is over. Seasonal depression may also be a factor and typically worsens during the Fall and Winter months. There are many types of Major Depressive Disorders so it can be challenging to identify which form(s) a person may have. The best way to determine this is by talking to a qualified therapist who can help assess your individual situation and history of symptoms. So, if it is Holiday Blues, Major Depression, and/or Seasonal Depression, the good thing is that there are ways to cope regardless of what the diagnosis may be.

Acknowledge your feelings. If someone close to you has recently died or you can't be with loved ones for other reasons, realize that it's normal to feel sadness and grief. It is okay to take time to cry or express your feelings. You can't force yourself to be happy just because it's the holiday season. You are allowed to have mixed emotions during the holidays.

Anticipate stress. Plan ahead of time what your strategy will be when times get stressful. Know what “triggers” your stress and start to identify what you will do in those situations. Share your plan with a trusted family member. Is it possible to take a walk outside for 15 minutes when a family gathering gets stressful?

Keep expectations manageable. Try to set realistic goals for yourself. Pace yourself. Organize your time. Make a list and prioritize the important activities. Forgo the elaborate Elf on the Shelf scenarios each night. Go ahead and get a frozen pie instead of making it from scratch. Build in time to relax and do nothing!

Be realistic about what you can and cannot do. Don't put the entire focus on just one day. Resist the urge to do everything you can to make the season perfect for everyone. Just have as much fun as you can and don't expect it to be flawless. Say “no” if you need to! Reduce expectations and allow yourself the freedom to not do everything for everyone. Communicate to others when you need help and let people help you.

Leave the past in the past and look toward the future. Life brings changes. Each season is different and can be enjoyed in its own way. Don't set yourself up in comparing today with the past. New traditions and memories can be made every year!

Do something for someone else. Volunteering your time or doing something to help others also is a good way to lift your spirits and broaden your friendships. For example, consider dropping off a meal and dessert at a friend's home during the holidays. If you are visiting family or friends that are hosting a meal, offer to help set the table, take everyone's drink

orders, play a game with the kids, take the dog out for a walk, or more importantly—volunteer to do the dishes afterwards! This will be the best hostess gift!

Set a Holiday Budget. Set up a budget and stick with it. Try free activities such as taking a drive to look at holiday decorations, going window shopping, or making a snowman. Think back to some of your best holiday memories — do they revolve around the most expensive presents you got or are they more about the experiences you had?

Don't abandon healthy habits. Don't let the holidays become a free-for-all. Overindulgence may add to feelings of stress and guilt. Have a healthy snack before holiday meals so that you don't go overboard on sweets, cheese or drinks. Eat healthy meals. Get plenty of sleep. Include regular physical activity in your daily routine. Try deep-breathing exercises, meditation or yoga. Avoid excessive tobacco, alcohol and drug use. Be aware of how the information culture can produce undue stress, and adjust the time you spend reading news and social media as you see fit.

Try something new. Celebrate the holidays in a new way. Order in from Uber Eats, try having a holiday Meal Kit delivered or just focus on making your favorite food of the holiday and not the whole meal.

Don't compare yourself with others. Take a break from scrolling through social media if it makes you have feelings of inadequacy and self-doubt. Remember that most people are trying to portray a perfect image and may not really reflect what is happening in reality.

Spend time with supportive and caring people. Reach out and make new friends, or connect with someone you haven't heard from in while. If you feel lonely or isolated, seek out community, religious or other social events or communities. Many may have websites, online support groups, social media sites or virtual events. They can offer support and companionship.

Save time for yourself! Recharge your batteries! Let others share in the responsibility of planning activities. Spending just 15 minutes alone, without distractions, may refresh you enough to handle everything you need to do. Find something that reduces stress by clearing your mind, slowing your breathing and restoring inner calm.

Seek professional help if you need it. Despite your best efforts, you may find yourself feeling persistently sad or anxious, plagued by physical complaints, unable to sleep, irritable and hopeless, and unable to face routine chores. If these feelings last for a while, talk to your doctor or a mental health professional. Glade Run can help!