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Coping with the Holiday Blues



The holidays are a time for tradition and for sharing food, gifts, relaxation, and good times with family and friends. But sometimes, they don't go that smoothly. The fact that they seldom are the way we want them to be is what causes so much of the "holiday blues." Add to that the demands on our time and money and it's easy to see why the holidays can leave us feeling both stressed and depressed. Here are some tips for maintaining your sanity during the holidays.

Keep It Simple

Keep your expectations reasonable so you won't feel let down. This includes your expectations of yourself. Avoid elaborate preparations that leave you exhausted or in debt. The holiday spirit is not about cooking the perfect meal or buying the perfect presents. If shopping is your biggest source of stress, try one or more of these approaches:

- Shop from home using mail-order catalogs, or shop online.
- Shop early or shop a little bit at a time.

- Set a time limit for holiday gift buying.
- Choose simple gifts.

Treat Yourself Right

Be kind to yourself, allowing some time for doing what you truly enjoy. Be reasonable about alcohol and rich foods. Try to get your usual amount of sleep.

Start Your Own Traditions

One source of holiday blues is the loss of meaning in many of our childhood traditions. Or perhaps families are too widely scattered to carry on family traditions. Start your own traditions that include people near you. In time, such traditions may become as cherished as those of your childhood.

Acknowledge Losses

Loss of a loved one, relationship, or tradition is felt more intensely during holidays. Acknowledge the loss in some simple way, such as looking through a photo album. A holiday period following a loss is a good time to change traditions somewhat so that you're less likely to compare this season with the ones before the loss.

Watch Out for Family Strife

Holidays are not good times for resolving family disputes or confronting relatives with grievances. If disputes arise during the holidays, agree on a time in the future to resolve them when emotions aren't running as high.

Be a Volunteer

Volunteering your time is one holiday tradition that

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can be pursued even when family and friends are far away. Help out at a local service center or homeless shelter that offers holiday meals, or offer to drive seniors to shopping centers or holiday events.

Do Something After the Holidays

When the holiday rush is over, many people feel lost. Plan some activities for after the holidays. It gives you something to look forward to and provides a transition into the non-holiday mode.

If, in spite of everything, holidays give you the blues, and you feel you are drifting into more serious depression, talk it over with a friend, counselor, or spiritual advisor. It can make an enormous difference.

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Creating Healthful Holiday Traditions

You can help reduce your stress this holiday season by creating the following positive traditions:

Take Care of Your Body

- **Exercise.** Don't skip exercise in order to get more done.
- **Relax.** Allow for time to take in the true joys of the season.
- **Eat healthy foods.** Make some healthy treats for holiday dinners. You don't have to give up all your favorite holiday foods; instead, limit how much you eat of foods that are higher in fat.

Take Care of Your Emotions

- **Prioritize.** To avoid getting overwhelmed, write down a list of what needs to be done, and then do the most important things. See if there are any items you can let go of, or if you can share some of the responsibilities with others.

- Let go of old traditions that don't benefit you or your family any longer.
- Don't give in to the urge to overbuy. See if you can give home-made gifts or other cheaper gift alternatives that show you are giving from the heart.
- If going to or throwing your own holiday parties is too much stress, cut out some of the festivities.

Take Care of Others

- **Volunteer or help others.** Not only are you helping those in need, it'll take your mind off of family problems or grievances.
- **Do more activities as a family.** Spend time with children and relatives instead of spending too much time shopping or running from party to party.
- **Create some holiday routines** that you can do as a family, like watching movies, cooking, or volunteering at a soup kitchen together.

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