

DEPRESSION, Stress, and the HOLIDAY BLUES

For some people, the holidays are not full of happiness or cheer. Loneliness, separation from loved ones, and anxiety about the future may make the holidays a difficult time.

Many factors may contribute to the holiday blues, including:

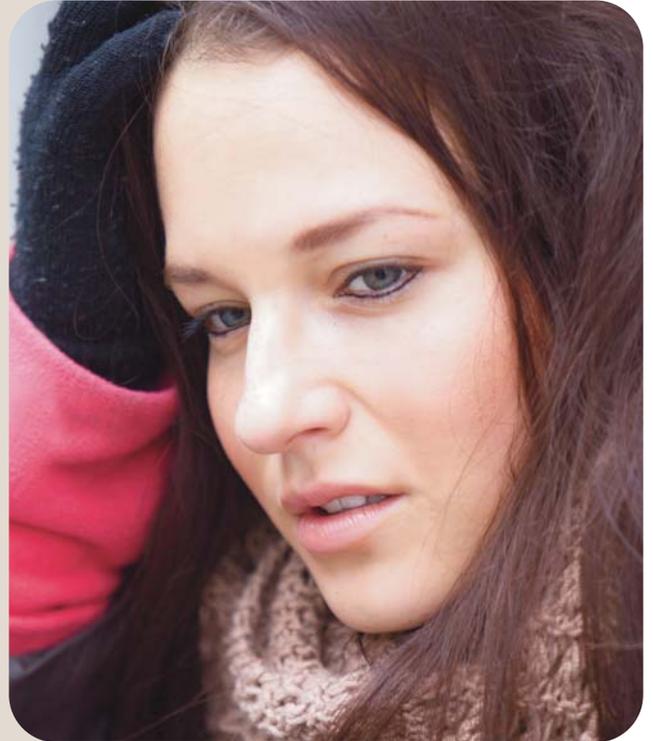
- Stress
- Fatigue
- Unrealistic expectations
- Over-commercialization
- Financial constraints
- Not being with family and friends
- Grief because a deceased loved one will not be part of the holiday celebration

The demands of shopping, parties, family reunions, and houseguests may also contribute to feelings of tension. Common stress responses related to the holidays include:

- Headaches
- Excessive drinking
- Overeating
- Difficulty sleeping

Some people experience an emotional letdown after New Year's. This may be a result of excess fatigue and stress or conflicts with family over the holiday season. Many people also make the New Year a time for self-reflection or resolutions, which may lead to disappointment if the person has not made enough progress toward goals in the past year.

If you have difficulty with managing holiday stress or if you are prone to feelings of sadness or depression around



the holidays, here are some ways to cope:

- **Keep expectations for the holiday season manageable.** Set realistic goals and be certain to pace yourself. Organize your time by making lists and prioritizing important activities and tasks. Avoid putting all of your focus on one day.
- **Accept that feeling sad about the loss of a loved one or a relationship is not unusual during the holidays.** Feelings of grief are often stirred up during the holidays, especially in the

first year or two after the loss of a loved or the end of a relationship. Be honest with friends and family members about feelings of loneliness or sadness. It may be helpful to acknowledge lost loved ones at family celebrations or other events or to tell stories that keep their memories alive for younger family members.

- **Live in the holiday moment.**

Life brings changes, and that includes changes in traditions. Getting frustrated because a child must spend holiday time with the in-laws or a favorite event has been discontinued won't improve your holiday cheer. Focus on enjoying the events you can attend and work on creating new traditions with loved ones. If someone can't attend a family celebration, consider adding a second, more casual event or rescheduling the group gathering to a different date.

- **Volunteer.** Helping others is a good way to remind yourself of the meaning behind the holidays and to alleviate feelings of loneliness or unhappiness.

- **Take holiday-themed stress breaks.** Enjoy free, simple activities such as driving around to look at holiday decorations, going window shopping (without making purchases), or making a snowman with your kids.

- **Avoid drugs and alcohol.** The physical and mental effects of excessive drinking often increase feelings of depression. Avoid using over-the-counter or prescription drugs unless prescribed by a physician.

- **Spend time with supportive people.** Reach out to people who make you laugh or who help you to get a fresh perspective on your problems. Make a point of catching up with an old friend or distant relative with whom you haven't spoken in a while.



- **Make time for yourself.** Recharge your batteries by engaging in routine activities, such as reading, exercising, or going for a long walk. Ask others to share in the responsibilities of holiday events by bringing a dish to pass at family gatherings or sending emails about where to meet for group activities.

If feelings of holiday stress or depression last for more than a few days, it is important to seek professional help. Contact your physician or call LifeMatters 24/7 for assistance (even on holidays).

Source: National Mental Health Association

LifeMatters® professionals are available 24 hours a day, every day of the year to discuss a variety of concerns.

Call anytime.

1-800-367-7474

Toll-Free United States, Canada, and Puerto Rico
From overseas, call collect to **262-574-2500**

Visit **LifeMatters®** online at **mylifematters.com**

Language assistance services in your preferred spoken and written languages are available at no cost by calling **1-800-367-7474**.