



# Tips to Avoid Holiday Depression

The holiday season is meant to be a joyous occasion, but this time of year can also bring added emotional and financial stress that may trigger depression. Patricia Woods, Ph.D., LMFT, LMHC, PCC Director and Psych Consult - Liaison Service for NewYork-Presbyterian Queens, says those who are depressed are advised to seek professional help. Dr. Woods suggests the following strategies to enjoy a happy and healthy holiday season for those who may be prone to the “holiday blues.”

- 1. Keep It Real.** There are so many social activities, chores and events during the holiday season. You simply can't do it all. Keep your expectations reasonable and set realistic goals about what you can and cannot accomplish. Say “no” when you need to, your priority is you and your family.
- 2. Spread the Joy.** Spread the joy out over the entire holiday season rather than placing all of the importance on one specific day or event. In doing so, you'll be less likely to become overwhelmed.
- 3. Don't Expect Miracles.** If you and a family member tend to bicker, this will probably be the case during the holidays as well. Prepare yourself for the inevitable. You can't change your relationships in one day. Enjoy your time with your family without expecting them to be someone else on a holiday.
- 4. Change Things Up.** Make a few changes in your holiday celebrations this year. Think about the things that caused you the most stress in past years and look for new ways to enjoy them. For example, if you baked six types of pies last year, only bake two this year. Or if you made five types of cookies, only make three this year. In other words, enjoy your baking, but cut down on the time and effort.
- 5. Take Care of Yourself and Others.** Make a special effort to eat healthy and nutritious meals and to include a little exercise in your daily activities. Taking care of yourself can help boost your mood and give you the extra energy you need to accomplish your tasks. Try to make time for others as well. For example, you can volunteer at a soup kitchen or prepare a few gifts for families in need. Doing things for others who are less fortunate than yourself will help you to keep the holidays in perspective.
- 6. Stay Connected.** Holidays can be lonely if you have lost a loved one. Stay in touch with family and don't be afraid to share your feelings. Acknowledging your emotions can help to reduce their effect on you.
- 7. Be Grateful.** Rather than thinking about what you can't buy, be grateful for what you have and all of the positive things in your life. Think about the extra time and joy that you have to share with your friends and family.
- 8. Recognize Depression.** If you are experiencing some signs of depression: crying spells, difficulty sleeping, feelings of sadness or guilt and appetite changes, reach out and get help. If these symptoms show up in your daily list, slow down and reach out to friends and family for extra support. If the symptoms persist for several weeks past the holidays, seek professional help from a qualified mental health professional to help you cope with your depression.