

Tis the Season: Avoiding the Holiday Blues

By Alphonso Gibbs, Jr.,
Men’s Health Network

The six weeks encompassing Thanksgiving, Christmas, and New Year’s—collectively called “the holidays”—are for most a magically unique time of year.

But for many, the holidays bring hurt. Caused by factors including the weather, separation, death, stress, unrealistic expectations, hypersentimentality, guilt, or overspending, holiday depression—also called the “holiday blues”—can zap the merriment out of even the most wonderful time of the year.

Holiday depression affects one million people every year. Men and women, young and old, all fall victim to feelings of sadness, loneliness, anxiety, guilt, and fatigue during this emotionally charged season.

Men’s Health Network offers the following 10 suggestions to help you identify and ward off—or at least better cope with—potential sources of holiday depression.

1. Acknowledge that you’re hurting – Others may expect certain attitudes and behaviors from you that you may not feel. The retail industry’s “holiday hype” presents an overly sentimental, nostalgic, and even imaginary notion of the holidays (usually to try to sell you something). Still, feelings of sadness, loneliness, or depression don’t automatically vanish just because it’s the holidays. Acknowledge your pain, be open and honest with others, refuse to feel guilty, and get help if necessary. It’s ok to laugh! Don’t be afraid! You won’t be struck

by a bolt of lightning for laughing!

2. Have a plan to deal with your feelings – Try to surround yourself with people who care about and support you—family, friends, or church members. Invest yourself in an exercise program (aerobic activities such as walking, running, cycling, etc., are recommended because of their mood-elevating ability). If necessary, see your doctor or therapist. And learn to say “no.” Others’ expectations are not a reason for your own mental health to suffer.

3. Set realistic expectations – Keep your expectations realistic rather than perfectionistic. Prioritize and reduce self-imposed holiday preparations. Delegate responsibilities. Realistically plan your budget, spending, and shopping. Do less and enjoy more. Obsessing over endless details is bound to change this long-awaited, once-a-year season from a time of exuberance to one of exhaustion. Make it a point to be honest with yourself, and if necessary and possible, limit the time and situations/people you want to be around. When you’ve had enough of either, make sure that you have a way to leave or step away.

4. Take time for yourself – Why is it called holiday depression? Because, for most people, these feelings don’t occur at other times of the year. Remind yourself of what you enjoyed during the previous months, then continue them during the holidays. Make yourself a priority! Instead of a “Discount Double Check,” give yourself an

“Emotional Double Check”. Give yourself permission to feel what you feel. Just don’t stay there too long! Getting enough rest, eating and drinking in moderation, exercising, and continuing other favorite activities can maintain normalcy, routine, control, and predictability.

5. Consider that your depression may actually be caused by this time of year – Seasonal Affective Disorder, or SAD, occurs because of reduced exposure to sunlight—which is just what happens during

7. Bury the hatchet – Perfect families don’t magically appear during the holidays, but family conflicts can. “Letting go” and forgiving can help heal past wounds. Additionally, family feuds can even be deliberately set aside until after the high-tension holidays in order to facilitate the peace and enjoyment of everyone at this special time.

8. Start your own traditions – Both families and traditions change with time. (Every tradition had to start somewhere!) Rather than reminiscing over the “good old days,”

accept the fact that change may be necessary, grasp the season as it is now, look forward to the future, and create your own family traditions that can be enjoyed and even preserved for future generations.

9. Keep your alcohol intake low – Don’t pour gasoline on a fire. Remember, alcohol has a depressive effect on your nervous system, so if you’re experiencing the holiday blues, drinking too much alcohol will only worsen your depression.

10. Rededicate yourself to your spirituality – The “reason for the season” is often swallowed up by maddening materialism that can distract from the history, meaning, and significance of holiday celebrations. Step back, slow down, and refocus on transcendent, eternal matters. Rededicate yourself to spiritual pursuits, such as church attendance, church work, prayer life, and other disciplines. Regain the focus originally intended by this time of year.

Men and women, young and old, all fall victim to feelings of sadness, loneliness, anxiety, guilt, and fatigue during this emotionally charged season

the holiday season when daylight hours are shorter. Check with your doctor to see if light therapy might be beneficial for you.

6. Help others – Soup kitchens, homeless shelters, nursing homes, churches, and scores of other organizations can always use volunteers, especially at critical times of the year. Additionally, you’ll benefit from the company of other people around you rather than being alone.

And, help others help you! Tell those who care about you what you do or don’t need from them. They often don’t know how to help, or what to say, but want to.

WHAT ARE YOU SHOPPING FOR?



ATRIO
HEALTH PLANS



BRIDGESPAN



KAISER
PERMANENTE



TRILLIUM



HEALTH NET



LIFEWISE
HEALTH PLAN



MODA HEALTH



OREGON'S
HEALTH CO-OP



PACIFICSOURCE



PROVIDENCE



HEALTH
REPUBLIC

11 carriers. More than 100 plans. 4 value tiers. We're open and ready to help.

CoverOregon.com or 1-855-COVER-OR



COVER
OREGON™

