

"Holiday Depression": Fixable And Something Not To Be Ignored

from the American Counseling Association

According to lots of advertising, TV specials, and magazine stories, the winter holidays are a period of endless warm family activities, elaborate gift giving and wonderful parties with friends. For most people, the holiday season is indeed a happy time, but it can also be a period of sadness, anxiety and depression.

One major cause of the holiday blues is the unrealistic holiday expectations many of us have that create fantasy goals impossible to achieve. None of us have "perfect" families and "ideal" holiday experiences such as we see portrayed over and over in the media during this season.

We may also feel left out because we aren't having the holiday experience we believe others are enjoying. There are parties we aren't invited to, gifts we can't afford, or new holiday clothes beyond our budget. We feel depressed because we are comparing ourselves to how things "ought to be" and that leaves us feeling we're being cheated or missing out..

Fortunately, holiday depression is very fixable. The first step is simply recognizing that media-promoted perfect holiday images aren't realistic. Refuse to compare yourself to that "ideal" TV family or those neighbors you imagine are having incredibly wonderful holidays. Instead, focus on all the good, positive and real things in your own life and emphasize those things that you really enjoy during the season.

Another way to fight holiday depression is to focus on your lifestyle. The holidays can bring changes in your daily habits that directly affect your moods. You may be eating differently (holiday cakes, candies and probably more alcohol), exercising less or not at all (you're busier, it's too cold, gets dark earlier), and you may be more tired thanks to a busy holiday schedule.

Making a conscious effort to get back to a healthier diet and to increase your amount of exercise can do a great deal to overcome holiday depression. So can planning your time better and getting a good sleep each night.

Lastly, don't wallow privately in your depression. Go meet with friends, not to discuss your feelings but just to enjoy them socially. Friends and family can do a great deal to lift your mood.

But if you find that your holiday depression is not going away despite your best efforts, try talking with a professional counselor. Serious depression is not a health problem to be ignored.

Counseling Corner" is provided by the American Counseling Association. Comments and questions to ACAcorner@counseling.org or visit the ACA website at www.counseling.org

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