

Tips for Beating the Holiday Blues

Holidays are a time for celebrations, parties, and get-togethers. But sometimes the holiday season can also be a source of the blues, especially for older people, who may think about how quickly time has passed, or miss loved ones more during this time of year. Health conditions or concerns about money can also make it harder to enjoy the holidays. The AGS Health in Aging Foundation offers the following tips to help cope with the melancholy that may accompany the holidays.

Top 5 Tips

GET OUT AND ABOUT

Ask family and friends for help traveling to parties and events. Invite family and friends over. Taking a brisk walk in the morning before you begin the day, or in the evening to wind down your day, is a great way to beat the blues.

VOLUNTEER

Helping others is a great mood lifter. To volunteer, contact your local United Way (www.unitedway.org), or call places such as local schools, hospitals, museums, or places of worship to inquire about volunteer opportunities in your neighborhood.

DRINK RESPONSIBLY

It is easy to overindulge around the holidays, but excessive drinking will only make you feel more depressed. One drink = 12 ounces of beer, 5 ounces of wine, or 1.5 ounces of hard liquor. The recommended limit for older men is 14 drinks per week and 7 per week for older women.

ACCEPT YOUR FEELINGS

There's nothing wrong with not feeling jolly; many people experience sadness and feelings of loss during the holidays. Be kind to yourself, seek support, and even laugh at yourself every now and then.

TALK TO SOMEONE

Don't underestimate the power of friends, family, mentors, and neighbors. Talk about your feelings; it can help you understand why you feel the way you do. A simple phone call, a chat over coffee, or a nice e-mail, greeting card, or letter can brighten your mood.

Recognize Warning Signs of Depression

Holiday blues are usually temporary and mild, but depression is more serious and can linger unless you get help. Signs of depression include:

- Sadness that won't lift; loss of interest or pleasure in doing things
- Changes in appetite or weight
- Frequent crying
- Feeling restless or fidgety
- Feeling worthless, helpless, or guilty
- Decreased energy, fatigue, being "slowed down"
- Trouble concentrating
- Difficulty falling or staying asleep, or sleeping too much

Depression is treatable. Talk to your primary healthcare provider or get other professional help if you experience five or more of these symptoms every day for two weeks. If you have recurring thoughts of death or suicide, you should get help immediately.

Help Someone with the Holiday Blues

INCLUDE THEM

Invite them out and to get-togethers. Take into account their needs, such as transportation or special diets.

LEND A HAND

Offer to help someone with their cleaning, shopping, cooking, and other tasks for get-togethers in their homes.

BE A GOOD LISTENER

Be a supportive listener and encourage discussions about feelings and concerns. Acknowledge difficult feelings, including a sense of loss if family or friends have died or moved away. Try to put yourself in the other person's shoes to understand how they feel.

ENCOURAGE THEM TO TALK WITH A HEALTHCARE PROVIDER

The holidays can cause people to feel anxious and depressed. But for some, holiday tensions can lead to full-blown clinical depression. Often, older adults don't realize that they are depressed. If you suspect depression in someone you know, you may need to bring it up more than once. Let the person know that depression is a treatable medical illness and is not something to be ashamed of.