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# abcd23. A Primer for Holiday Survival

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Modified March 6, 2008

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We all look forward to the holidays and hope that they will be a time of happiness, friendliness, fellowship, and harmony. Yet often our anticipation and excitement turns into feelings of depression and/or family disharmony.

Part of what happens in the holiday season, in terms of mood changes and anxiety, may occur because of the stressfulness of holiday events. Overdrinking, overeating, and fatigue may also cause it. The demands of the season are many: Shopping, cooking, and travel house guests, family reunions, parties, office parties, and extra financial burden.

Sometimes people who are not generally depressed actually struggle with holiday depression. Symptoms can include headaches, insomnia, uneasiness, anxiety, sadness, intestinal problems, and unnecessary conflict with family and friends. Here are some tools to get through the holiday season happily—as well as ways to prevent problems and misery for yourself and your loved ones:

- Keep your expectations reasonable, particularly remembering that this year, despite being a nation facing new uncertainties, we all have much for which to be thankful.

- Be reasonable with your schedule. Do not overbook yourself into a state of exhaustion--this makes people cranky, irritable, and depressed.

- Decide upon your priorities and stick to them. Organize your time.

- Remember, as we approach Thanksgiving, no matter what our plans, t he Holiday does not automatically take away feelings of aloneness, sadness, frustration, anger, and fear

- Be careful about resentments related to holidays past. Declare an amnesty with whichever family member or friend you are feeling past resentments. Do not feel it is helpful or intimate to tell your relative every resentment on your long laundry list of grievances. Don't let your relative do that to you, either.

- Don't expect the holidays to be just as they were when you were a child. They NEVER are. YOU are not the same as when you were a child, and no one else in the family is either.

- Feeling like you are under scheduled or under planned for the holidays? Volunteer to serve Thanksgiving Dinner at a homeless shelter. Work with any number of groups that help poor children at the holidays. There are many, many opportunities for doing community service. No one can be depressed when they are doing community service.

-Plan unstructured, low-cost fun holiday activities: Window-shop and look at the Holiday decorations. Look at people's Christmas lighting on their homes, take a trip to the countryside, etc.--the opportunities are endless.

- If you can drink, do not let the holidays become a reason for overindulging and hangovers. This will exacerbate your depression and anxiety. Contrary to popular opinion, alcohol is a depressant.

- Give yourself a break; create time for yourself to do the things YOU love to do.

Most of all, if you find yourself feeling blue, remember: The Choice is Always Yours: The sky is partly sunny, and the glass is half full, if you want it to be that way. Depression is usually a clinical disorder, but sometimes "the blues" confront all of us, particularly at holiday time. It may be caused by the memory of loss, feelings of disappointment, or just being run down from parties, overeating, and drinking. But for many of us, holiday depression can be a choice we, in effect, choose to make.

If we choose not to make this choice, we can choose instead to focus on the partly sunny skies and revel in our gratitude for our bounty, health, hope, and our courage to face each day with hope and determination.

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