



A Healthy Outlook!

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What To Do About the Holiday Blues

Not everyone shares in the celebration and joy associated with the holidays. Many people feel stressed and unhappy in response to the demands of shopping for gifts, spending large amounts of money, attending parties and family gatherings, and entertaining house guests. It is not uncommon to react to these stresses with excessive drinking and eating, difficulty sleeping, and physical complaints. The holiday blues are a common result. If you experience reactions like these during the holidays, you are not alone. Let's take a look at what causes the holiday blues and what you can do about them.

What Causes the Holiday Blues?

Fear of disappointing others. Some people fear disappointing their loved ones during the holidays. Even though they can't afford to spend a lot of money on gifts, some people feel so obligated to come through with a fancy gift that they spend more than they can afford.

Expecting gifts to improve relationships. Giving someone a nice present won't necessarily strengthen a friendship or romantic relationship. When your gifts don't produce the reactions you had hoped for, you may feel let down.

Anniversary reactions. If someone important to you passed away or left you during a past holiday season, you may become depressed as the anniversary approaches.

Struggling with the Holiday Blues?

Consider attending **Slowing Down to Enjoy the Holiday Season** December 13
12:00–1:00 p.m.
CESC, Room 223, presented by
EAP staff

Bad memories. For some families, the holidays are times of chaos and confusion. This is especially true in families where people have substance abuse problems or dysfunctional ways of relating to each other. If this was true in your family in past years, you may always carry memories of the disappointment and upheaval that came with the holidays. Even though things may be better now, it is difficult to forget the times when your holidays were ruined by substance abuse and family dysfunction.

It could be SAD. People who live in northern states may experience depression during the winter because of Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD). SAD results from fewer hours of sunlight as the days grow shorter during the winter months.

Strategies for Dealing with the Holiday Blues

While the holiday blues are usually temporary, these ideas can help make this year's holiday experience more pleasant and less stressful:

Be realistic. Don't expect the holiday season to solve all past problems. The forced cheerfulness of the holiday season cannot ward off sadness or loneliness.

Drink less alcohol. Even though drinking alcohol gives you a temporary feeling of well-being, it is a depressant and never makes anything better.

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Give yourself permission not to feel cheerful. Accept how you are feeling. If you have recently experienced a loss, you can't expect yourself to put on a happy face. Tell others how you are feeling and what you need.

Have a spending limit and stick to it. Look for holiday activities that are free, such as driving around to look at holiday decorations. Go window-shopping without purchasing anything. Look for ways to show people you care without spending a lot.

Be honest. Express your feelings to those around you in a constructive, honest, and open way. If you need to confront someone with a problem, begin your sentences with "I feel."

Look for sources of support. Learn about offerings at mental health centers, churches, and synagogues. Many of these have special support groups, workshops, and other activities designed to help people deal with the holiday blues.

Give yourself special care. Schedule times to relax and pamper yourself. Take a warm bath or spend an evening with a good book.

Set limits and priorities. Be realistic about what you will be able to accomplish. Prepare a To-Do list to help you arrange your priorities.

Volunteer your time. If you are troubled because you won't be seeing your family, volunteer to work at a hospital or food bank. Volunteering can help raise your spirits by turning your focus to people who are less fortunate than you are.

Get some exercise. Exercise has a positive impact on depression because it boosts serotonin levels. Try to get some type of exercise at least twice each week.

After the Holidays. For some people, holiday blues continue into the new year. This is often caused by leftover feelings of disappointment from the holiday season and being physically exhausted. The blues also happen for some people because the start of a new year is a time of reflection, which can produce anxiety. ■

Rejuvenating Holidays

by Radha Patwardhan, Dietetic Intern, Utah State

They're coming! November is just around the corner and December will follow. Soon everybody will be talking about holidays, shopping, turkey dinners, and holiday gifts. Holidays are everybody's favorite time of the year. It is a time to enjoy holiday dishes and family traditions, give thanks, have social gatherings, and reflect. But at the same time, the holidays can be the most stressful time of the year. Here are some tips that will help you enjoy your holidays and remember them for years to come.

☞ Eat healthy, drink plenty of water, and sleep well. Shopping trips to crowded malls, holiday gatherings, and dealing with crazy drivers on the road is rather stressful. Being well nourished and well rested will allow you to enjoy your holiday activities.

☞ Though the holidays are a time for traditions, don't try to do everything by yourself. Simplifying your holiday will reduce your stress. Rely on your family members to help with preparations.

☞ Make exercise part of your daily ritual, even if it's less than usual. Just taking a walk will help your mental and physical health. Also remember that exercising is not a license to eat more than usual.

☞ Sit down and enjoy! Give yourself a time to enjoy every bite of food you eat and give your complete attention to what you eat. When cooking for a holiday brunch, don't stand over the stove for taste tests. Use a plate and take a couple of minutes to savor everything you are eating.

☞ Choose your indulgences! Do not consume foods that are not your favorites or that you can get any time of the year. But when it comes to your favorite holiday treats, go wild and enjoy. Make every calorie count.

☞ Be realistic about your health goals during holidays. Have a strategy of weight maintenance versus weight loss. Shooting for all healthy food all the time is a great way for failure. Allow yourself some leeway, and you will have more fun and feel better at the start of the New Year.

And, New Year's resolutions are just around the corner. So it is a good time to reflect on the past and start a New Year with a Healthy Outlook!

Contributed by Susan E. Ghelman, R.D., L.D., Food Service Supervisor, Division of Food and Nutrition Services, 301-670-8295. ■

Is It More Than Just the Holiday Blues?

Clinical depression is more than just feeling sad for a few weeks. The symptoms generally include changes in appetite and sleep patterns, having less interest in daily activities, difficulty concentrating, and a general feeling of hopelessness. Clinical depression requires professional treatment. If you are concerned that a friend, relative, or even yourself may be suffering from more than just holiday blues, it is important to seek the help of a qualified mental health professional. You might consider setting up an appointment with the Employee Assistance Program (EAP) at 301-460-2100

if you have concerns. For further information, visit these Web sites:

American Psychological Association (www.apa.org);

National Depressive and Manic-Depressive Association (www.ndmda.org);

National Mental Health Association (www.nmha.org).

Adapted from an article by Red Doran, ACSW. Printed with permission. ■

H-A-L-T

Use this 12-step slogan as a reminder: when feeling Hungry, Angry, Lonely, or Tired, take a break. Resist the impulse to overeat, drink, or make other choices with negative consequences. Instead, make positive choices in order to feel more content and relaxed.

HUNGRY
LONELY
ANGRY
TIRED

Essential Elements of Staff Recognition

- * **Match** the recognition to the person according to individual preferences.
- * Directly **link** recognition to **performance** and goal **achievement**.
- * Be **timely** by giving recognition as soon as possible after desired behavior.
- * Always state **why** recognition is given to ensure clarity and **repeat behavior**.
- * Make it **fair** by allowing all employees equitable opportunities for recognition.
- * Be **creative** by using a variety of methods to recognize employees' accomplishments.
- * **Involve** your team in determining what recognition they value.
- * Give **ongoing** words of **praise** according to accomplishment.
- * **Always** remember the golden words **"Thank You."**

Suggestions from the Government of Alberta Web site, <http://www.gov.ab.ca/home/index.cfm> ■

Massage Therapy Anyone?

A key to a healthier you is this year's theme for the National Massage Therapy Awareness Week (October 23-29, 2005). This annual national event, spearheaded by the American Massage Therapy Association (AMTA), was designed to increase public awareness about the benefits of therapeutic body massage and encourage people to take the extra time to care for their health through massage. Some of the many benefits of massage therapy include:

- ☛ Reduces stress
- ☛ Aids relaxation
- ☛ Relieves pain and anxiety
- ☛ Assists with quicker injury recovery
- ☛ Relieves muscle soreness
- ☛ Reduces blood pressure and heart rate
- ☛ Increases blood and lymph circulation
- ☛ Increases endorphins (natural pain killers)
- ☛ Boosts immune system
- ☛ Beneficial to overall health

Contributed by Michele Mnatzakanian, CMT (Certified Massage Therapist), AMTA member, Maryland license number M03107. Questions about massage therapy? Contact Michele at cell number 301-908-7653 or by e-mail at Michele55@comcast.net. ■

Quote:

"Change is the law of life. And those who look only to the past or present are certain to miss the future."

—John F. Kennedy

Volunteer Opportunity

The Literacy Council of Montgomery County, Maryland (LCMC) is a private, nonprofit organization dedicated to helping adults in Montgomery County learn to speak, read, write, and understand English. Volunteers are trained to tutor one-on-one or with small groups of students. The LCMC depends on volunteers to tutor about 1,100 residents of Montgomery County every year.

Qualifications:

- ☑ Ability to make a minimum six-month commitment.
- ☑ Willingness to provide status and progress information each month about the student.
- ☑ Patience (adults learn more slowly than children).
- ☑ Flexibility (our students have busy lives too)!

Prospective tutors must complete an orientation session and tutor-training workshop. Orientations are held on selected weeknight evenings from 7:30 to 9:00 p.m. The 12-hour training workshop is conducted on two Saturdays (usually consecutive).

Unless otherwise noted, orientations and workshops take place in the meeting room next to the LCMC office in the Wheaton Regional Library.

Volunteer tutors will be matched with a student, introduced to that student during the second workshop day, and supported every step of the way during the tutoring experience.

You can find additional information about the Literacy Council of Montgomery County (LCMC) at www.literacycouncilmcmd.org.

If you are interested in volunteering, please contact the LCMC. ■



Upcoming Events

December 1

World AIDS Day

Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS)

unaids@unaids.org

www.unaids.org/en/default.asp. Materials available.

December 13

“Slowing Down to Enjoy the Holiday Season”

12:00–1:00 p.m., CESC, Room 223, presented by EAP staff

RSVP at 301-460-2100

January:

National Birth Defects Prevention Month

March of Dimes Birth Defects Foundation

1275 Mamaroneck Avenue, White Plains, NY 10605

888-MODIMES (663-4637)

askus@marchofdimes.com, www.marchofdimes.com

Contact Pregnancy and Newborn Health Education

Center. Materials available.

February:

Heart Health Month

American Heart Association

7272 Greenville Avenue, Dallas, TX 75231

800-242-872

inquire@americanheart.org, www.americanheart.org

Contact program departments or local chapters.

Materials available.

Do you have a question for the EAP?

Send your questions via FirstClass, Outlook, or the Pony to Jeff Becker.

Published by the Department of Communications
for the Employee Assistance Program

1290.06 • ELECTRONIC GRAPHICS & PUBLISHING SERVICES • 12.05

Ask the EAP

Q. What type/frequency of counseling is done in the EAP?

A. Generally speaking, the MCPS EAP offers assessment, referral, and short term counseling. Most employees who come in for counseling are seen for somewhere between one and six sessions. At the time of initial assessment at the EAP a referral will be made if it is determined that the problem is one that requires longer-term work. Examples of issues that would likely require a referral include addictions, psychiatric problems, and long-standing marital and family issues. When a referral is made, we always consider your insurance, location, and type of problem so that a good match can be made. ■



A Healthy Outlook!

To help employees with
troubling issues before they
become overwhelming



EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE

SPECIALISTS: Debbie Tipton
Robyn Rosenbauer
Jeff Becker

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Important Notice: Information in *A Healthy Outlook!* is for general information purposes only and is not intended to replace the counsel or advice of a qualified health professional. For further questions or help with specific problems or personal concerns, contact your employee assistance professional.

You may contact us or send your questions and comments to
Debra_Tipton@fc.mcps.k12.md.us.

Please note that e-mail is not necessarily confidential.