

Although the holidays are a time of joy for many people, the holidays can trigger symptoms of anxiety and depression. Seasonal depression is more common than people think; approximately 14-percent of Americans experience the holiday blues (www.healthline.com).

These are just a few tips to help overcome holiday blues. If you have symptoms that persist or worsen, please seek medical attention. If you have thoughts of suicide, please seek medical attention immediately. The Suicide Prevention Hotline is available 24-hours a day, 7 days a week. The telephone number is 1-800-273-8255.

How do you know if you are experiencing the holiday blues? Here are a few symptoms:

1. You feel more tired than usual, not due to lack of sleep or being busier.
2. Loss of interest in things that typically bring you joy.
3. You are having a difficult time staying focused, concentrating or remembering routine things.

Common causes of holiday blues:

1. **Time change.** Daylight Savings Time can cause our internal clocks to get “off-track,” which can lead to a lack of adequate sleep. Decreased sleep is a major contributor to feeling tired and lethargic during the day. It is important to try to reestablish a proper sleep schedule.
2. **Overscheduling.** We have a tendency to pack our schedules more during the holiday season. We try to attend as many social events as we can, we have extra cooking and preparations to do, children are out of school on vacation and need our attention during times that we normally schedule for other activities. During these times, we often feel rushed, burdened and overwhelmed. Do not overbook yourself.
3. **Lack of planning.** Procrastination this time of year is common. This may lead to a great deal of stress and contribute to holiday blues. Make a list. Use a calendar and schedule your shopping, errands and activities. Follow your plan!
4. **Unrealistic fantasies about our families.** Frequently during the holiday season, we watch movies that portray “the wonderful life” and perfect families. Unrealistic expectations that our families should meet these high standards can be quite depressing. Try to be realistic and emphasize your family’s strengths rather than their weaknesses. Remember, it is a movie. NO family is perfect. Not even the actors in the movie.
5. **Lack of time for yourself.** A major focus for the holidays is providing things for other people or looking after them. We are so busy that we forget to take care of ourselves. Self-care is vital to your overall health and well-being. It does not have to cost money for self-care. While a Spa Day would be wonderful, taking thirty minutes for a hot bubble bath can be relaxing—and less expensive!

Tips on dealing with the holiday blues:

1. **Limit alcohol.** Holidays are a time for gatherings and many of them have alcohol present. Limit your alcohol intake and try not to keep it readily available in your home. Drinking alcohol can affect your mood and amplify any negative feelings or thoughts you may be experiencing.

2. **Sleep.** We need sleep. While we sleep, the body recovers, it moves the thoughts and emotions of the day from one part of our brain to another, and it rejuvenates cells and energy. Valuable rest can improve your mood and change your thoughts from negative to more positive and rational.
3. **Learn to say “no.”** Do not overschedule yourself. Overscheduling and not making time for yourself can lead to emotional breakdowns. Learn how to say “no” and stick with it! It is all right to not accept every invitation or not take on every task during the holidays. Something’s gotta give—don’t let it be you. Take time to breathe. Deep breaths. Breathe in slowly. Count to five. Hold your breath for three seconds. Exhale slowly (as if you are blowing up a balloon), count to five. Repeat until you feel relaxed.
4. **Be open to new traditions.** You may have an image of holidays filled with flash and flair. It may not be feasible for you and your family. It is okay. Start new traditions. Allow your family to be a part of the decision-making for new traditions. This way, your family traditions truly are YOUR family traditions.
5. **Get support when mourning a loved one or a loss.** If you have experienced a loss, the holidays can be an especially difficult time. While it may be tempting to isolate yourself and grieve, it can be helpful to spend time with family and friends. They may be able to provide you with emotional support. Alternatively, find a grief support group. Members in these groups empathize and understand how you are feeling.
6. **Spend time with family and friends.** Instead of spending time alone, get your family and friends together. Live away from family? Invite friends to spend time together. You do not have to spend a lot of money—have a potluck get together. Everyone bring one thing: one person bring chips, another bring dips, someone bring iced tea, etc. It does not have to be fancy to be fun and filled with love.
7. **Do something fun!** Again, it does not have to cost a lot of money: meet with friends over a cup of coffee; gather a few friends and watch a comedy on the television. Be creative!
8. **Exercise.** Walk around the block or a park (safety first) a couple of times a week. A quick 10-minute walk will get your heart rate up and release mood-boosting endorphins.
9. **Avoid overeating.** Holiday outings can often lead to overeating, which can affect your mood and well-being. Before venturing out to social events, eat a healthy snack of veggies or healthy grains.

The holidays can be an especially difficult time for people. If you are unable to be with family or friends during the holidays, look for volunteer opportunities that will allow you to be around other people.

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