13 Tips for Surviving the Holidays With Depression

by ERIC PATTERSON

Coping With Depression During the Holidays

The seasons are changing. The TV commercials are featuring the all latest toys and the jolly man that brings them. Gatherings are being planned. Whether you like it or not, the holidays are upon you.

Holidays are a time of making lists, planning, preparing, cooking, eating and togetherness. Many people welcome this time of year and meet it with excitement, hope and happiness. Others associate the holidays with stress, despair and disappointment.

If depression is a part of your life, then the holidays are likely a struggle for you. You may wish you could bypass December altogether and skip ahead to mid-January. As appealing as that may sound, the holidays are here. So, what do you want to make of it, and how do you cope with depression and the holidays together?

The Link Between Depression and the Holidays

What impact do the holidays have on your depression? Answering this question is important but complicated for many.

Holidays are associated with breaking your routine, being around people with strong emotional attachments and reflecting on the past year.

Other environmental factors, like changes in sunlight, diet and sleep can influence your depression. Awareness and understanding give you a fighting chance against depression. Don’t passively hope that history will not repeat itself.

Tips for Making the Most of the Holidays With Depression

Dealing with depression during the holiday season can be tough, especially as you watch everyone else being filled with holiday spirit and joy. Meanwhile, you are feeling exhausted, sad and overwhelmed.

For a lot of people, especially those living with depression, the holidays can be the worst time of the year. If you are currently depressed or have been depressed in the past, you need to be careful when coping with holiday stress.

Here are 13 ways to reduce your stress, cope and manage depression during the holiday season.

1. Manage Your Expectations

Don’t get hung up on what you think the holidays are supposed to be about. If you are trying to compare your holidays to what the media displays, or what others say it should be, you will be disappointed.

Stop worrying about what is missing during the season, or not having enough holiday spirit. Just take the holidays as they come and keep your expectations reasonable.

2. Try Something Different

If certain aspects of the holiday make you sad, angry or give you anxiety, do not do them. Trying different things is okay.

You do not have to cook an entire meal. It is okay to go out to eat that day instead.

Maybe you would rather spend Christmas day on your own. Drop off the holiday gifts to the family and spend the day watching your favorite movies.

3. Be Realistic

The holidays do not have to be perfect or what they were in previous years. Families change and so can traditions.

Hold on to some traditions, but be willing to make new ones. For example, your extended family no longer spends the holidays together, and perhaps that bothers you. So, try finding new ways to celebrate, such as sharing stories of old memories online or sending pictures of new memories.

4. Don’t Overdo It

You do not have to do everything. Fatigue, taking on too much and overextending yourself will bring out depressive symptoms.

Delegate as much as you can and manage your time wisely. Most importantly, you need to learn to say no.

If you conserve your energy, you can enjoy the holidays and spend time with loved ones without letting stress and depressive feelings take hold.

5. Let Go

If some family members have made you feel bad in the past, the chances are that it will not change. But if you know what to expect, you will not allow your buttons to be pushed.

If things get uncomfortable and your emotions take over, remove yourself from the situation. Go for a walk or a drive and clear your head.

6. Lean on Your Support

When you are depressed, you need people to turn to when things feel tough. When you start to feel lonely, seek out support from loved ones.

Make sure you also keep in touch with your supportive friends and family regularly during the holiday season. Reach out by telephone, text, or in person to keep yourself on task.

7. Be Specific When Asking for Help

It is okay to ask loved ones for help, but you need to be specific about what you need help with. Ask your spouse to put up the decorations, your sister to help you prepare the holiday dinner and your mom to watch the kids if you need a break.

People in your life are willing to help out, but you have to ask them and tell them exactly what you need. After all,

no one can read your mind, and they will not know you are struggling if you do not tell them.

8. Hold on to Memories of Loved Ones

The holidays remind us that some of our loved ones are not around anymore and missing them can bring about depressed moods. But we can either feel sad or we can celebrate their memories.

Perhaps, you could donate to your mother's favorite charity, or celebrate your father's memory by having dinner at his favorite place.

9. Don't Stress About What You Cannot Control

Families may disagree on a variety of topics or situations whether it is the holidays or not. Perhaps your sister and brother cannot stand to be in the same room, and that might upset you.

You cannot control others, but you get to control how you respond to the situation. For example, if your siblings do not get along that well, take a deep breath and remember that their problems or animosity are not your fault or your problem.

10. Take the Stress Out of Holiday Shopping

You are already feeling overwhelmed, so do not add to it. If you have gift-giving anxiety and worry about trying to find the perfect gift for your loved ones, opt for gift certificates to their favorite stores instead. (Gift certificates make the best gifts, so do not make gift giving so hard.)

You could save yourself some time and not deal with crowds by shopping online. Also, you should also draw up a budget and stick to it to avoid overspending.

11. Volunteer

You may already be stressed and overextended but helping others who are less fortunate might just make your problems seem smaller.

You can also find some comfort in helping others. After all, you are making a small contribution to the lives of others who are not as fortunate.

12. Practice Self-Care

When you do not prioritize your health, you risk the return of depressed feelings. Try to stick to a sleep schedule, keep moving, make sensible food choices and do not overindulge in food and alcohol.

With all the busyness of the season, it is very easy to forget to take your medications. Don't let that happen and make sure you are current on refills.

If you see a therapist, schedule at least one appointment during the holiday season to help you stay grounded. Phone check-ins are also an option.

13. Cut Yourself Some Slack

The holidays are a time where people tend to dwell on their mistakes and all the things they are not proud of. Feeling this way only serves to bring down your mood and bring out about depressive feelings.

This is not an easy time, so give yourself a break and be kind to yourself. After all, it is the season for kindness, forgiveness and goodwill; so, save some of it for yourself.