



**Mental Health America of Franklin County**

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## **Coping with Holiday Depression and Stress**

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The holiday season is a time full of joy, cheer, parties, and family gatherings. However, for many people, it is a time of self-evaluation, loneliness, reflection on past failures, and anxiety about an uncertain future.

### **What Causes Holiday Blues?**

Many factors can cause the "holiday blues": stress, fatigue, unrealistic expectations, over-commercialization, financial constraints, and the inability to be with one's family and friends. The demands of shopping, parties, family reunions, and houseguests also contribute to feelings of tension. People who do not become depressed may develop other stress responses, such as: headaches, excessive drinking, over-eating, and difficulty sleeping. Even more people experience post-holiday let down after January 1. This can result from disappointments during the preceding months compounded with the excess fatigue and stress.

### **Coping with stress and depression during the holidays**

- Keep expectations for the holiday season manageable. Try to set realistic goals for yourself. Pace yourself. Organize your time. Make a list and prioritize the important activities. Be realistic about what you can and cannot do. Do not put entire focus on just one day (i.e., Thanksgiving Day) remember it is a season of holiday sentiment and activities can be spread out (time-wise) to lessen stress and increase enjoyment.
- Remember the holiday season does not banish reasons for feeling sad or lonely; there is room for these feelings to be present, even if the person chooses not to express them.
- Leave "yesteryear" in the past and look toward the future. Life brings changes. Each season is different and can be enjoyed in its own way. Don't set yourself up in comparing today with the "good ol' days."
- Do something for someone else. Try volunteering some time to help others.
- Enjoy activities that are free, such as driving around to look at holiday decorations; going window-shopping without buying; making a snowperson with children.
- Be aware that excessive drinking will only increase your feelings of depression.
- Try something new. Celebrate the holidays in a new way.
- Spend time with supportive and caring people. Reach out and make new friends or contact someone you have not heard from for awhile.
- Save time for yourself! Recharge your batteries! Let others share responsibility of activities.

### **Can Environment be a Factor?**

Recent studies show that some people suffer from Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD), which results from fewer hours of sun light as the days grow shorter during the winter months. Phototherapy, a treatment involving a few hours of exposure to intense light, is effective in relieving depressive symptoms in patients with SAD.

Other studies on the benefits of phototherapy found that exposure to early morning sunlight were effective in relieving seasonal depression. Recent findings, however, suggest that patients respond equally well to phototherapy whether it is scheduled in the early afternoon. This has practical applications for antidepressant treatment since it allows the use of phototherapy in the workplace as well as the home.

### **Where To Get Help**

If depression or anxiety is persistent or interfering with your ability to function in daily life, it may be helpful to talk with your doctor, spiritual advisor, or Mental Health America of Franklin County at 614-221-1441. They may suggest you visit with a psychiatrist, psychologist, social worker, or other qualified counselor.

**Mental Health America of Franklin County** is a private, not-for-profit organization, established in 1956. We help people navigate the mental health system. We are dedicated to promoting mental health in Franklin County through advocacy, education, and support services. Our programs include: information and referral to community mental health and alcohol/drug services; free support groups for people with mental illness and their families; an Ombudsman program that assists clients in navigating the mental health and alcohol/drug system; mental health screenings in English and Spanish; Pro Bono Counseling Program where underinsured and uninsured individuals can receive free counseling; community and professional mental health education including Get Connected; maternal mental health support and advocacy (POEM); and a quarterly newsletter featuring legislative updates and new happenings at MHAFC. We receive funding from the Franklin County ADAMH Board, United Way of Central Ohio, individuals, foundations, and corporations. To become a member or find out more information, please visit us online at [www.mhafc.org](http://www.mhafc.org).