

Tips for a Mentally Healthy Holiday Season

While the holidays are typically thought of as a time of joy and happiness, they also can be difficult because of stress and mental health needs. Stress experienced during the holidays is often due to our own expectations of ourselves to be all things to all people regardless of the physical, mental, and financial strain it places upon us. Take care of yourself. Statistics show we are especially vulnerable to illness and accidents when we are overly tired or under excessive stress.

How to Minimize Stress

- Get enough sleep.
- Eat well and slowly.
- Take vitamins. Add a stress complex tablet.
- Avoid excessive amounts of caffeine.
- Recognize that alcohol, cigarettes, tranquilizers and other drugs increase stress.
- Plan regular exercise into your schedule
- Take time for yourself. Make an appointment with yourself to do something you enjoy.

Hints for the Holidays

Here are some ideas to make the holidays more meaningful and less stressful

- Re-evaluate your family traditions each year to make sure they are still important to you and your family. Continue to celebrate your favorite traditions – and consider making a new one.
- Eliminate what you consider the most unpleasant tasks of the holiday season.
- Include someone who is alone, lonely, or in need on the holiday.
- Plan ahead.
- Buy yourself something special. Wrap it as a fig and open it when you feel down.
- Express your feelings.
- Comfort a loved one dealing with grief.
- Visit someone who is sick.
- Volunteer with friends or family.

Handling the Holidays When a Loved One has a Mental Illness

Holidays can be especially stressful for families when a member has a mental illness. Large groups can be over stimulating and confusing for individuals with a mental illness. Holidays also can be painful reminders of times past when things were better. To reduce holiday stress, families can:

- Discuss plans in advance.
- Acknowledge feelings related to holidays.
- Avoid assuming how individuals feel or what activities family members want to be a part of.
- Keep expectations realistic.
- Respect and support each family member's choices regarding participation in family activities.
- Be flexible and allow for some changes in plans and participation, when possible.

-From "When Someone You Love Has a Mental Illness," by Rebecca Woolis

Helping Children Survive the Post-Holiday Blues

Post-holiday blues are the inevitable let down after the frenzied holidays and can be a difficult period for children. Here are some ideas to help families cope:

- Don't minimize your children's feelings.
- Let your child know you feel concerned when they feel down.
- Maintain consistent family rules and schedules.
- Plan something fun for several weeks after the holidays to shift the focus to the future.

-From 4Parents Help Line Column

When the Holiday Blues are Really Depression

Studies show that environmental factors can contribute to feelings of depression around the holidays. Some people have Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD), which can result from fewer hours of sunlight during the winter months. Researchers have found that light therapy, a treatment involving a few hours of exposure to intense light, is effective in relieving depressive symptoms in people with SAD.

For More Information:

For a free and confidential mental health screening, go on-line to www.mhacolorado.org.