

The Wellness Exchange



A Publication of
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Dealing with the Holidays: Blues vs. Depression

Holidays can be stressful for a variety of reasons. Whether through unreasonable expectations, unmet goals from years past or simply adding to already busy schedules, the holiday season can bring much tension and stress for individuals and families.

Feeling Blue or Depressed?

Feeling 'blue', down or sad is often a normal reaction to any life situation, including the holidays. The 'blues' are considered a temporary state and although they may last a few weeks or more, the symptoms will subside.

Depression involves the body, mood, and thoughts. It affects the way a person eats and sleeps, the way one feels about oneself, and the way one thinks about things. Depression is not the same as a passing blue mood. It is not a sign of personal weakness or a condition that can be willed or wished away. People with depression cannot merely "pull themselves together" and get better. Without treatment, symptoms can last for weeks, months, or years. Appropriate treatment, however, can help most people who suffer from depression.

Signs of Holiday Blues

- Headaches
- Insomnia
- Hypersomnia (sleeping too much)
- Changes in appetite
- Agitation and anxiety
- Excessive or inappropriate feelings of guilt
- Diminished ability to think clearly or concentrate
- Decreased interest in activities that bring pleasure such as food, work, sex, friends, hobbies, entertainment

Symptoms of Depression

- Persistent sad, anxious, or "empty" mood
- Feelings of hopelessness, pessimism
- Feelings of guilt, worthlessness, helplessness
- Loss of interest or pleasure in hobbies and activities that were once enjoyed
- Decreased energy, fatigue, being "slowed down"
- Difficulty concentrating, remembering, making decisions
- Insomnia, early-morning awakening, or oversleeping
- Appetite and/or weight loss or overeating and weight gain
- Thoughts of death or suicide; suicide attempts
- Restlessness, irritability
- Persistent physical symptoms that do not respond to treatment, such as headaches, digestive disorders, and chronic pain

Risk Factors for Holiday Blues:

Psychological Factors:

- Loss of a loved one
- Marital or family conflicts
- Work pressures and deadlines
- Social pressures
- Unrealistic expectations
- Remembering the joys or sorrows of past holidays

Financial Factors:

- Limited financial resources
- Extra burden of buying gifts, holiday clothing and decorations, and hosting parties
- Keeping up with everyone else

Physical Factors:

- Stress and fatigue
- Too much food and drink
- Change in diet, increase in sugar intake
- Change in daily routine.

For more on the information presented, visit:

<http://www.nimh.nih.gov>

<http://ncadi.samhsa.gov>

Have a Healthy Holiday

- Keep holiday expectations realistic. Be practical about what you can and cannot do.
- Try to keep to a normal routine. Change can disorient you and the whole family.
- Realize that problems don't go away just because it's a holiday.
- Don't dwell on the past, good or bad.
- Set aside time for yourself.
- Learn how to say "no" to commitments you know you can't handle.
- Spend time with family and loved ones.
- Set your spending limit and stick to it.
- Volunteer at a local charity.
- Try something new.
- Eat healthy meals and get enough sleep.
- Exercise. Drink plenty of water.
- Keep alcohol consumption to a minimum. Excessive drinking will only make your feelings worse.
- When hosting a party, be sure to offer lots of non-alcoholic drinks and healthy, nutritious food.
- Don't drink and drive; don't let anyone you know drink and drive.



Safe Toys and Gifts Month



According to Safe Kids Worldwide, approximately 3.8 billion toys and games are sold each year in the United States, more than half during the holiday season alone. Although the majority of toys are safe, they can become dangerous if misused or if they fall into the hands of children who are too young to play with them.

Each year, more than 118,000 children ages 14 and under are treated in hospital emergency rooms for toy-related injuries.

When selecting a toy for your child, avoid the following:

- Toys with small removable parts. The small parts are hazardous and can pose a choking hazard to children under age 3. Use a small parts tester (which can be purchased at a toy or baby specialty store) to measure the size of the toy or part. If the piece fits entirely inside the tube, then it is considered a choking hazard.
- Toys with sharp points or edges. Children may unintentionally cut themselves or another person.
- Toys that produce loud noises. Toy guns and high-volume portable cassette recorders can permanently impair a child's hearing.
- Propelled toy darts and other projectiles. Propelled toys can cause cuts or serious eye injuries.
- Toys with strings, straps or cords longer than 7 inches. Long strings and cords could wrap around a child's neck and unintentionally strangle him or her.
- Electrical toys. Electrical toys are a potential burn hazard. Avoid toys with a heating element—batteries, electrical plugs—for children under age 8.
- Toys painted with lead paint. Exposure to lead can result in lead poisoning, causing serious damage to a child's brain, kidneys and nervous system.
- Toy cap guns. Paper roll, strip or ring caps can be ignited by the slightest friction and cause serious burns.

The National SAFE KIDS Campaign recommends the following guidelines:

Infants under age 1:

In the first few months of their lives, children are immobile. Eventually, they learn to reach, roll over and sit up. In the second six months, children become more mobile and are at an increased risk for choking. The most suitable toys for the first year include activity quilts, stuffed animals without button noses and eyes, bath toys, soft dolls, baby swings, cloth books and squeaky toys.

Children ages 1 to 3:

At this age, children are curious and have little sense of danger. They like to climb, jump, throw and play rough-and-tumble games. The best toys for this age group are books, blocks, fit-together toys, balls, push-and-pull toys, pounding toys and shape toys.

Children ages 3 to 5:

As any parent of a preschooler can tell you, these children "think with their feet" and spend much of their time running. They like tests of physical strength and begin to develop skills such as the ability to ride a tricycle, finger control, and the ability to build with large blocks and construction materials. Toys that are most suitable for this age group include approved nontoxic art supplies, books, videos, musical instruments, and outdoor toys such as a baseball tee, slide or swing.



Children ages 5 to 9:

In the early part of this age group, children become creative and more physically active. They can write, engage in arts and crafts, and they are able to use simple mechanical toys such as cars and trains. Recommended toys include craft materials, jump ropes, puppets, books, electric trains (after age 8) and sports equipment. Remember, children ages 8 and up can begin to use electrical and battery-operated toys. Check tape recorders and battery-operated toys regularly for loose or exposed wires. Don't allow children to change batteries.

Children ages 9 to 14:

At this age, children enjoy team sports and games that require increased dexterity such as pick-up sticks, marbles and jacks. Strenuous physical activity is also popular for this age group. Children begin to develop hobbies and a strong interest in scientific activities. For these children, appropriate gifts include computers, microscopes, table and board games, and outdoor and team sports equipment. Ensure that older children's toys are kept out of reach of younger children, for whom they may present a danger.

Follow the Instructions

Warning labels and manufacturers' instructions tell you how to use the product safely. If the manufacturer sets a minimum age or other restrictions, there's a reason. Follow the instructions.

Please visit

<http://www.usa.safekids.org> to view the presented information and more!

Safe Kids Worldwide also recommends these precautions:

If you buy toys secondhand or get hand-me-downs, visit www.recalls.gov/ to make sure the toy hasn't been recalled for safety reasons. If a new toy comes with a product registration card, mail it in right away so the manufacturer can contact you if the item is ever recalled.

Don't hesitate to report defects or design features that seem dangerous. If your child has a close call, the next child might not be so lucky. Report safety concerns about toys to the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission at 800-638-2772. Your experience could be part of a pattern that might lead to a recall.