

## **Don't Let "Holiday Depression" Ruin Your Holidays**

from the American Counseling Association

While the holiday season is a happy time for most people, it can also be a time of sadness and despondency for some. Holiday depression can be a very real, but correctable problem.

There are numerous reasons why the holidays can have us feeling blue. One is the unrealistic expectations we may have for ourselves and the season. Constant media images of the "ideal" holiday can create fantasy goals impossible to achieve.

We may start feeling low because we aren't invited to all the best parties or aren't having the "perfect" holiday we imagine others are enjoying. This comparing ourselves to how things "ought to be" leaves us feeling that we're missing out and being cheated for some reason.

The holiday lifestyle can also contribute to holiday depression. Our diets may change, usually including more candy, cake and alcohol than normal. We also often exercise less. Busy holiday schedules, coupled with less daylight and colder temperatures, can make it harder to stick to our regular workout regimen.

Combine the mood swings that go with a high-calorie, high-sugar diet with a lack of exercise and colder weather and depression can easily occur. We may feel more sedentary and lethargic, and perhaps guilty as extra pounds show up around our waistlines.

Fortunately, correcting the holiday blues can be relatively easy. Simply recognizing that the media-promoted "perfect holiday" images aren't realistic is an important first step.

Refuse to compare yourself to that TV "family" or the neighbors you imagine having that rosy "ideal" holiday. Instead, focus on the good and positive in your own life and those things you really enjoy during this season.

Making a conscious effort to get back to a healthier diet and to increase your amount of exercise can also do a great deal to overcome holiday depression.

Lastly, don't wallow privately when you're down. Go meet with friends, not to discuss your feelings, but just to enjoy them socially. Friends and family can do a great deal to lift your mood. You might also find volunteering, at a local soup kitchen, animal shelter or library, can be a real mood lifter.

Make a realistic effort and you should find your holiday depression abating. But if it's not, despite your best efforts, try talking with a professional counselor. Depression can be a serious health problem and not one to be ignored at any time of the year.

*"Counseling Corner" is provided by the American Counseling Association. Comments and questions to [ACAcorner@counseling.org](mailto:ACAcorner@counseling.org) or visit the ACA website at [www.counseling.org](http://www.counseling.org)*

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