

## The American Counseling Association's "Counseling Corner" Weekly Columns

### Holiday Depression Can Be A Very Real Problem

from the American Counseling Association

While the holiday season is a happy time for most people, for many it can be a time of sadness and even depression. Holiday depression can be caused by many things, but it also can be relieved.

Near the top of the list of what makes us depressed are the unrealistic expectations many of us place upon ourselves during this season. Constant exposure to media images of the "ideal" holiday can create fantasy goals impossible to achieve.

We may start feeling that we lack some important quality because we're not invited to the best parties or aren't having the "perfect" holiday we imagine others are enjoying. Comparing ourselves to how things "ought to be" leaves us feeling that we're constantly getting cheated. This can be especially true if holiday gift desires are fast outpacing your financial situation.

Holiday depression can also have its roots in the changed lifestyle many of us experience during this season. Our diets may change, usually including more candy, cake and alcohol.

We also often exercise less. Busy holiday schedules coupled with less daylight and colder temperatures make it harder to stick to that regular workout regimen.

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

Fortunately, correcting the holiday blues usually isn't impossible. Simply recognizing that the media-promoted "perfect holiday" images and limitless gifts 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 people and 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 in your depression. Go meet with friends, not to share your blue mood but just to enjoy them socially. Friends and family can do a great deal to lift your spirits.

But if you find that your holiday depression is not going away despite your best efforts, try talking with a professional counselor. Serious depression is not a health problem to be ignored.

*Counseling Corner" is provided by the American Counseling Association. Comments and questions to ACAcorner@counseling.org or visit the ACA website at www.counseling.org.*

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