

Health and Wellness

News You Can Use

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Battling holiday stress and depression



While many look forward to the holidays, others dread the season. If you feel stressed, the obligations at holiday time can take their toll on even the most cheerful of people. Here are some tips to help you minimize holiday stress.

Causes of stress

Ask yourself what exactly about the season makes you feel stressed. Your feelings may be triggered by the following:

- Unhappy childhood memories.
- Dealing with relatives that are particularly difficult.
- Reflecting on how life has negatively changed over the course of the year.
- The monotony of the season—seeing the same faces, eating the same food and going through the same motions.

- Lowered immune defenses because of the colder temperatures, high incidence of the flu, eating more and sleeping less.
- Financial stress.

Minimize holiday stress

Consider the following tips to help reduce stress this holiday season:

- Do not feel you must meet all family obligations. Make a list of the reasons why you engage in various holiday traditions to help you decide what events you should avoid and

what to join in on. Do not simply do something or go somewhere because of tradition, especially if it makes you unhappy.

- Ask others for assistance. For example, ask a relative to host the family get-together, or make it a potluck and have everyone contribute to the meal.
- Make a to-do list in chronological order to minimize stress.
- Enjoy the present and try not to worry about what may be lacking.
- Limit your alcohol intake.
- Stay active and continue to eat a balanced diet.
- Create a new tradition, such as volunteering, especially if you feel lonely.
- Make time for yourself and your needs, even when hosting guests in your house.
- Keep tabs on your holiday spending. Make a budget and stick to it, no exceptions.
- Learn to say "no." It's OK not to do everything.

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Be aware of Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD)

If you frequently suffer from the “winter blues,” you are not alone. It is not just something you have to “tough out.” You can talk with your doctor to find an effective treatment.

Seasonal affective disorder is a recurring depression that affects individuals during the winter months and recedes during the spring and summer.

How common is SAD?

It is estimated that between 4% and 6% of Americans suffer from SAD, with three-quarters of those affected being women, mostly in their 20s, 30s and 40s. Though SAD is most common during these ages, it can also occur in children, adolescents and the elderly.

What causes SAD?

The exact cause of SAD is still unknown, but researchers suspect that an increased level of melatonin in the blood could be a factor. Melatonin increases the need and desire to sleep. SAD affects people more during the colder, darker months because the body produces more melatonin during this time.



Decreased exposure to sunlight resulting in an increased production of melatonin causes the biological clock that regulates mood, sleep and hormones to run slower in winter. This is why those most affected by SAD tend to live in northern states; areas that experience decreased daylight for months at a time.

What are the symptoms?

Signs of SAD can vary depending on the severity of the condition. Here are some general symptoms:

- Difficulty concentrating
- Low energy and fatigue

- Decreased interest in daily activities, especially social activities
- Moodiness and irritability
- Increased appetite with weight gain
- Cravings for carbohydrates
- Increased sleep, with more daytime sleepiness
- Loss of interest in sex

Coping with SAD

In severe cases, your doctor can prescribe medication, but oftentimes self-help tactics can be just as effective:

- Increase the amount of sunlight in your home. Open blinds, add skylights and trim trees that block the sunlight.
- Get outside. Walk outdoors on sunny days, even during winter months.
- Exercise regularly. Physical exercise helps relieve stress and anxiety, which can exacerbate SAD.
- Find ways to relax.
- Learn how to manage stress better.
- Take a trip. If possible, take winter vacations to sunny, warm destinations.

Recipe

Healthy Halloween recipe: Spiderweb smoothie bowl

Ingredients

- ½ cup reduced-fat milk or unsweetened nondairy milk
- 1 large banana
- 1 tablespoon whole-milk plain yogurt
- 1 cup frozen mixed berries

Directions

1. Combine banana, berries and milk in a blender. Blend until smooth. Pour into a bowl.
2. Spoon yogurt into a small plastic bag. Snip off a tiny bit of one corner. Squeezing the yogurt through the hole, pipe 3 or 4 circles on top of the smoothie. Use a toothpick to create the web effect, dragging it from the middle of the bowl to the outside edge.



This spooky smoothie makes for a fun, healthy Halloween snack or breakfast. The spiderweb design is much easier than it looks—a perfect task for the kids!

Source: Eatingwell.com