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ADULT HEALTH BULLETIN

Oldham County
Extension Office
1815 N Hwy 393
LaGrange, KY 40031
(502) 222-9453

DECEMBER 2009

THIS MONTH'S TOPIC: HOLIDAY STRESS AND DEPRESSION

Welcome to the Holiday Season! It is a season of joy, laughter, family, friends, gifts, good food, and stress. The stress can lead to something else—depression. In fact, depression is rather common both during and after the winter holiday season.

Triggers of Holiday Stress and Depression

Holiday stress and depression is frequently associated with three main triggers:

- Relationships
- Finances
- Physical demands



Family holiday gatherings can be a source of tension and stress. During these tough economic times, families are struggling to meet their needs. Not having money for the wants, like gifts and travel expenses, can add stress and lead to overspending. Feelings of sadness and helplessness are not uncommon. Individuals can find themselves in a financial spiral that leaves them wondering how they will make ends meet. The demands of shopping, preparing holiday meals, and attending social events during the holidays leave many feeling exhausted and tired.

The following tips may help you manage or prevent holiday stress and depression:

- **Acknowledge your feelings**
Don't force yourself to be happy or cheery just because it is the holiday season. If a loved one has recently died or you are not able to be with your family and friends, it is normal to feel sad or lonely. Sometimes talking to someone who will listen and understands, can reassure you that things will get better and can lift your spirits.
- **Seek support**
If you are feeling down or lonely, seek out companionship and support from family members, friends, or religious or community organizations.
- **Be realistic**
You may find that some traditions are hard to maintain; as the family grows, getting everyone together may be difficult. Unexpected events can cause a change in plans.

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Concentrate on what you have and not on what you don't have.

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Find new ways to celebrate from a distance, such as sharing pictures, e-mails, or Web cams.

● **Set aside differences**

You will only be around family and friends for a short time. Practice forgiveness and pick a more appropriate time to discuss past disagreements.

● **Stick to a budget**

There will always be a bigger and better gift to buy. If it puts you in debt, it is not worth it. Determine what you can spend without going over your budget. Keep in mind that it's the thought that really counts.

● **Plan ahead**

Plan your holiday menus and shopping list in advance. Schedule specific shopping days to get ahead of last minute shoppers and to avoid the holiday rush. Do things in moderation. Too many activities, even those things considered fun, can leave you feeling more tired than fulfilled.

● **Learn to say "no"**

You are just one person and you can't do everything. If you feel yourself becoming overwhelmed, just say no.

● **Continue healthy eating habits**

Don't go overboard on holiday dishes. Some indulgence is OK, but learn to balance. Try eating a healthy snack like a piece of fruit or low-fat cheese so that you are not tempted to overeat. Get plenty of rest and make time for physical activity.

● **Don't forget to take a breather**

The holiday season is a time of giving, but don't forget to take some time for yourself. Just 15 minutes a day alone, may reinvigorate you and give you the mental and physical boost that you need to finish your day.

● **Forget about perfection**

There is no such thing as the perfect holiday. Accept that everyone has faults and imperfections. Just do the best you can and have fun doing it. What really counts are the memories you make with family and friends that will last a lifetime.

● **Don't be afraid or ashamed to seek professional help if you need it.**

Do you find yourself unable to lift your spirits, sad, anxious, unable to sleep? You can't seem to get motivated, having feelings of hopelessness, and these feelings last for several weeks? Talk to your doctor or a mental

health professional. You may have depression. Seeking help for depression does not mean that something is wrong with you or you can't handle your own problems. It's just smart. Getting help when it's needed is a sign of strength and not of weakness.

How can you turn holiday stress into peace and joy?

- Count your blessings.
- Concentrate on what you have and not on what you don't have.
- Maintain a positive attitude.
- Don't worry about the things you can't control.
- Exercise and eat good, nutritional foods.
- Avoid caffeinated beverages.
- Try to get eight hours of sleep each night.
- Do something just for yourself.
- Spending quality time with friends and family.



SOURCE:

- <http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/stress/MH00030>

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Written by: Travonia Brown-Hughes, Ph.D., MCH Postdoctoral Fellow, University of Kentucky HEEL program

Edited by: Connee Wheeler

Designed by: Rusty Manseau

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