

Fighting Depression Around the Holidays

As the holidays approach and another year comes to an end, many enter a period of reflection. Reflection can offer an opportunity to revel in the many exciting events of the year, or it can cause us to be consumed with self-doubt and regret. Instead of focusing on the promotions, new friends, and exciting vacations, for example, people remember all of things they had hoped to accomplish—losing weight, going back to school, learning to cook—the list can be endless and overwhelming. Fortunately, however, the challenges that come with managing depression during the holidays are not impossible.



Recognizing the Signs and Symptoms

Identify the issue. While the signs and symptoms of depression can vary, there are some hallmarks that can alert you or those around you that you may be feeling a bit down:

- Fatigue
- Eating more or less
- Sleeping more or less
- Inability to concentrate
- Feelings of worthlessness
- Depressed mood most of the time
- Lack of interest in activities that you used to enjoy

One of the most important factors in identifying these changes is self-awareness. Do yourself a favor and take note of how you generally live your life. Do you get together with friends on a weekly basis, enjoy hiking, or go to the gym often? If you wake up one day in December and have a difficult time remembering the last time you did any of these, it might be a sign that you are not acting or feeling like yourself.

Preventing Depression

Depression is not impossible to overcome, but why fight an unnecessary battle? If you know that you might be prone to feeling a little down during this holiday season, plan your preemptive attack now!

Create a plan for your holiday.

Goals give you something to focus on and preoccupy your mind. So fill your mind with something exciting and productive this holiday. Not into the holiday jingles and twinkling lights? Dedicate a portion of your time to volunteer work or commit to catching up with old friends, and be accountable.

Create new traditions.

Is this your first holiday away from your family who live in another state? If so, change your focus from longing for holidays past to designing the footprint for your very own holiday traditions. Print up some nice invitations for your first annual holiday party, or book your first of many holiday vacations. Whatever you decide to do, take ownership and control over how your valuable downtime is spent.

Finding Solutions

When you realize that a depressed mood has crept into your life, take action sooner rather than later. Remember that depressive symptoms have a tendency to increase in intensity—as do their impact on your mood, activity level, and motivation. Waiting until later may mean that you have less energy and motivation to tackle the weight of your emotions.

Regroup and reorganize.

When you realize that something has gone awry, develop a new game plan. Take a step back from all of your commitments and responsibilities, and evaluate what has changed in your life. Have you taken on too many tasks? Have you forgotten your goals and aspirations? Have you lost touch with the friends and household members who keep you grounded? Make a list of what is lacking in your life and what may need to be cut.

Utilize your resources.

Many companies offer their employees access to Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs). In addition to providing counseling services, EAPs often provide other services, like help with locating child care or elder care services, providing legal advice, offering financial planning, and research help to assist with some of the things on your to-do list. It is sometimes difficult to ask for help, but the result can be worthwhile.

Be kind to yourself.

The holiday season often reminds people to be nice and generous to others, but it is also important for you to be kind to yourself. Remember that variations in your mood are a part of being human, and getting back on track takes time. If you find yourself feeling sad or tearful, allow yourself to experience these very normal emotions, and make no apologies for them. You are human. You are capable. You can survive the holiday season!

Source: Burrell, S. (Reviewed 2020). Fighting depression around the holidays. Raleigh, NC: Workplace Options.

*Please be reminded that **Johns Hopkins Employee Assistance Program — JHEAP** offers you and your household members free, confidential, 24/7 access to professional counseling for any issue that's on your mind. To get started, call **888-978-1262**, log on to www.myccaonline.com (Company Code: JHEAP), or download the **CCA@YourService app** (Access code: JHEAP).*