



SRMC's Behavioral Medicine and Wellness Center Offers Tips for Beating Holiday Stress and Depression

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The holiday season is supposed to be the most wonderful time of year, but for a growing number of Americans, it also triggers feelings of stress, anxiety and depression.

“Participating in holiday traditions such as buying gifts, baking, decorating and hosting parties can be overwhelming,” said Jamie Benner, Program Manager of Salem Regional Medical Center’s (SRMC) Behavioral Medicine and Wellness Center. “These extra responsibilities, combined with financial worries and unrealistic expectations of a ‘perfect’ holiday, may lead to increased stress levels or even depression. The good news is that by planning ahead and following some simple strategies, most people can manage these feelings and get back to enjoying the holiday season.”

Here are some tips for reducing holiday stress:

- **Acknowledge and Accept Your Feelings**
The holidays can be a particularly difficult time for people coping with a loss, such as the death of a loved one. If you are feeling sad, allow yourself the time you need to cry or express your emotions.
- **Reach Out for Support**
If you are feeling sad or lonely because you are far away from family or loved ones during the holiday season, consider getting involved in community events or volunteering for a local organization during the holidays.
- **Don't Overextend Yourself**
The holidays can be filled with numerous responsibilities, from decorating and shopping to attending gatherings and entertaining. Set reasonable expectations for yourself and what you are able to accomplish. Don't be afraid to say no or ask for help.

- **Set a Budget**
Before you begin your holiday shopping, set a budget and stick with it. Allow yourself to spend only what you can afford; and start shopping early to avoid last minute impulse purchases.
- **Take Breaks**
Set aside some alone time each day to relax and take a break from your holiday preparations.
- **Plan in Advance**
Planning ahead and setting a schedule for shopping, decorating, baking and other holiday activities can help reduce anxiety and keep your stress level under control.
- **Manage Family Differences**
Family tensions and differences can add to your stress and make holiday celebrations less enjoyable. Try putting differences aside during the holidays and waiting until another time to address them.

“While experiencing some feelings of anxiety or sadness during the holidays is normal, if your stress or depression persists for weeks and makes it difficult for you to function, it is important to seek help from your doctor or a mental health care professional,” Benner added.

Locally, help is available for those with depression and other mental health conditions through SRMC’s Behavioral Medicine and Wellness Center (BMWC). The BMWC offers two types of outpatient treatments, facilitated by psychiatrist Ann Ciancone, M.D., and a team of specially-trained therapists.

For more information, contact the BMWC at 330-337-4935.

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Signs of Depression:

- Persistent sad, anxious or “empty” feelings
- Feelings of hopelessness and/or pessimism
- Feelings of guilt, worthlessness and/or helplessness
- Irritability, restlessness
- Loss of interest in activities or hobbies
- Fatigue and decreased energy
- Difficulty concentrating, remembering details and making decisions
- Difficulty sleeping or excessive sleeping
- Overeating or appetite loss
- Persistent aches or pains, headaches, cramps or digestive problems that do not ease even with treatment
- Thoughts of suicide (seek help immediately, if this is the case)

Symptoms of Stress:

A range of emotional, behavioral and physical symptoms often accompany elevated levels of stress, such as:

- Anxiety and nervousness
- Persistent irritability or moodiness
- Restlessness or insomnia
- Changes in eating habits
- Depression
- Muscle tension
- Headache
- Gastrointestinal problems