



# Coping with Post-Holiday Blues#

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Presenting by Meritus Behavioral Health Services

# Holiday Hangover Cure

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## TAKE YOUR VITAMINS!

Shorter days cause us to have less sunlight exposure which can cause vitamin D levels in the body to drop. Consider a boost with a vitamin D supplement. Melatonin levels can also drop leading to or supporting Seasonal Affective Disorder. Talk with your doctor about the best supplement for you.



## GET MOVING!

Freezing cold temperatures often provide a great excuse not to exercise right? Wrong! Think about trying a winter activity like skiing, ice skating or sledding. You might like it! Even hiking in the winter provides a completely different view of plants and animals that are surviving in spite of the cold temperatures!



## GET LIGHT THERAPY!

Make an effort to take a short walk outside or sit by a window during the day. If you work in an area with no natural light you might want try light box therapy.



## TREAT YOURSELF!

It may be months before your next vacation day. Plan a mini holiday or special outing with a friend or loved one or just by yourself for some alone time. Have a spa day that includes a massage which has been shown to decrease depression and improve mood.



## CONSIDER AROMATHERAPY!

Lavender has been shown to help with both sleep and depressive symptoms. Jasmine has also showed some benefit with SAD. Add these scents to your bath water, diffuser or aroma lamp.



## INDULGE IN CHOCOLATE!

Dark chocolate has been shown to boost dopamine levels in the brain. It also has some anti-inflammatory properties that can be good for your health. If you are trying to cut calories buy the dark chocolate kisses for a quick pick me up without blowing your diet.



## HYDRATE!

We often don't drink enough water when it's cold outside. However, the cold weather wreaks havoc with our skin and nails. This can cause cracking and open areas that can lead to infection. Try to get the recommended 64 oz. a day.

# Holiday Blues that Just Won't Quit

The holiday is over, the presents and decorations are put away and you're asking yourself what in the world you're going to do until Spring arrives. It's enough to bring you to tears! Shorter days and colder temperatures aren't helping either. Here are some things that can help improve your mood and chances of not only surviving, but thriving in the remainder of the winter season.



## **Cut Yourself Some Slack**

Negative thinking can sabotage your goals and decrease your motivation. If you are trying to make some changes in the New Year realizes that change takes time. Match your self talk to realistic goals.

## **Get Back to Your Regular Routine**

It was great to have some time off work and to be busy with visits to friends and family. Just the interruption to routine required to shop, decorate and participate in holiday celebrations can contribute to stress. Set your alarm so you wake up at the same time every day and go to bed at the same time every night. Getting back to a normal routine at work can also help you to feel in control of your life again.

## **Pamper Yourself**

Police your schedule. Make sure you are taking adequate time off to recharge.

## **Make appointments with Health Care Providers**

It's a good time to schedule that yearly physical, dental or eye exam. If you are experiencing appetite or mood changes it may also be a good time to see a counselor.

## **Stop the Holiday Junk Food Train**

Are you still eating leftovers and holiday cookies and candy? It's time to clean out your refrigerator and restock with fresh fruits and vegetables! You'll feel better for it!

## **Add Omega 3's to your diet**

Foods like fish and nuts are natural mood boosters and have been shown to help increase levels of serotonin in the brain. Serotonin is a neurotransmitter closely linked to depression and other mood disorders.

## **Change your Workout**

Try something new. Either alter your current routine or engage a friend in trying a new exercise adventure. You might find you really enjoy it!

# SAD

## Seasonal Affective Disorder

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### What is SAD?

As fall approaches it is common to feel sad about the days getting shorter. However, for some this feeling gets worse throughout the season and can cause serious behavioral problems. Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD) shares many symptoms with depression including:



- depressed mood
- hopelessness
- loss of energy and motivation
- social withdrawal
- difficulty concentrating
- cravings for carbohydrates leading to weight gain

The feelings generally follow an up and down pattern from the late fall through the winter establishing a pattern over more than one year.

### Why Does SAD Occur?

The change in exposure to natural light has an impact on:

- circadian rhythms that control our sleep/wake cycle
- melatonin levels
- serotonin - a chemical linked to depression

Women who have a family history of depressive problems and also who live greater distances from the equator are most at risk.

## How Does SAD Affect my Life?

These behavioral symptoms can impact school, work, and relationships negatively. Some people with SAD may even have thoughts of suicide or have suicidal behavior. There tends to be an increase in substance abuse for those with SAD as they try to cope inappropriately with the symptoms.

## How Do I Know if I Have SAD?

There is no medical test available for SAD. However, your doctor, nurse, or behavioral health provider can assess for this problem by asking questions about mood changes, thoughts and behaviors, sleeping and eating patterns, life-style and social situations.

## How Do I Prevent or Treat SAD?

There is no way to prevent SAD but sitting closer to windows, getting outside even on the coldest and cloudiest days, and regular physical exercise to improve overall health and reduce stress can help to keep SAD symptoms from worsening. Even if you don't suffer from SAD these things will help improve your overall functioning through the months of the year when we experience less sunlight.

If you do have SAD, your doctor, nurse or behavioral health professional may suggest one or a combination of treatments including light box therapy, antidepressant medication, and/or counseling to help minimize or eliminate the symptoms.

## What is Light Box Treatment?



Light therapy with the use of a light box is a way of replacing those lost sunlight hours. Light therapy involves sending visible light through the eyes to the brain. A light box produces a full spectrum light with a measured light intensity. The harmful UV-B rays are filtered out for eye and skin safety. The light box produces brightness equal to being outside on a clear, sunny spring morning. Exposure time to the light is recommended to be about 30 to 60 minutes daily, sitting directly under the light with eyes open. The more days per week one can use the light, the better.

Usually positive effects can be seen in about 3 to 5 days, but sometimes it takes either a shorter or a longer time. Light therapy is not usually needed during the spring and summer months when there is plenty of sunshine!

# TIPS FOR FEELING GOOD



## *Simple Suggestions That Work*

**Everyone has ups and downs, good days and bad days. But, given the choice, who wouldn't prefer to feel good? By using the following techniques you can learn how to enjoy life more, and turn those bad days, into good ones in no time.**

### ENJOY YOUR BODY

A massage or eating a wonderful meal can be physical pleasures that make life worth living. Enjoy regular physical activity such as dancing, playing softball or taking walks, to uplift your spirits.

### CREATE A SUPPORT NETWORK

A support network is a group of people you can turn to for comfort, a sympathetic ear, or good ideas. A support network can include family members, friends, coworkers, or anyone who cares about you. Reach out and make your network wider; you'll be glad you did.

### MAKE TIME FOR FUN

Making time for fun is like taking extra vacations throughout the year. What are your favorite amusements? Movies, day trips into the country, going to a fair can all be fun. Get out of your chair and get going! You'll feel good before, during and after.

### HELP OTHERS

Few things give more pleasure than helping others. Find out about some of the programs in your community that need your help. Try something unlike anything you've ever done. It will enrich your life with new ideas, information and feelings.

### GET IN THE HABIT

You can get in the habit of feeling good by being good to yourself and others. When you care about yourself, you'll find that life holds more meaning and pleasure.



# Learn to Laugh

*It May Be the Best  
Medicine*

When Hal Wright died suddenly at the age of 82, his children and eight adult grandchildren gathered quickly from around the United States to be with their mother and grandmother. The setting was in a quiet retirement community but, over the next three days, neighbors graciously tolerated the noise from the Wrights' backyard. What they heard was the sound of laughter. Although Hal was dearly loved and much missed, his grandchildren celebrated the rare opportunity to be together with stories from their childhoods, jokes and gentle teasing.

## Laughter Is Good Medicine

What the Wright grandchildren were doing, of course, was coping with the stress of the loss of a loved one. Laughter is great medicine in all kinds of stressful situations. Hospitals often arrange visits from performing groups or celebrities to lift the pall of illness, or they use DVDs to show comedies and to help lighten the mood. Similarly, some employers host occasional parties to ease tensions in the workplace and reduce stress.

## Humor Relieves Tension

Some people naturally use humor in stressful situations. Others feel that every situation is so serious that any humor is inappropriate. Most of us, however, appreciate a good laugh when we're scared or worried. It distracts us and relieves tension.

## Coping With Stress

While there's no such thing as taking yourself too seriously, unremitting stress can wear you down and make it harder to cope. Scientists theorize that laughter releases certain "feel-good" hormones which, in turn, make it easier for us to cope with stressful situations.

## Remember Laughter

The next time you're ill, worried or overstressed, try to remember that you can intervene in the stress process. Get together with friends, take in a show or rent a comedy video. You might be surprised at how much better you feel after you've spent some time laughing.

## Employee Assistance Program

Call for More Information or Professional Confidential Counseling 301.766.7600 or 1.800.635.2774

# GOAL SETTING



## Four Steps to Goal Setting:

- Establish your goals
- Make an action plan
- Carry out your action plan
- Evaluate your success

### I. ESTABLISH YOUR GOALS:

1. Establish a clear idea or vision of what you would like to achieve. Visualize what you would like your life to be like in two months, one year, five years. Ask yourself: What do I value? What matters to me? What is important to me? (**values clarification**)
2. Create short-term goals (days or weeks), medium term goals (months), and long-term goals (years).
3. Set clear goals that do not contradict each other. (*ex. majoring in art in college when you want to be a doctor.*)
4. Choose goals that are yours alone, not someone else's or what you think they should be. (*ex. I want to be a teacher but my father wants me to be a computer programmer.*)
5. Set realistic goals. (*ex. I am 50 years old and want to play in the NBA.*)
6. Define goals clearly.

### II. MAKE AN ACTION PLAN

Prioritize your goals.

1. Spot incompatible goals and select the most important to you, or attempt to reach a compromise (Example: earning more income and having more free time may at first glance seem incompatible, but not if you get a significantly higher paying job where you can make more money working less hours than before.)
2. Address one goal at a time, selecting either the easiest or the most urgent to begin with.
3. Be specific about what you want to achieve. (Example: "Being happier" is not specific; you will need to define what that looks like – more time with family or more time for hobbies or more time for travel).
4. Try to anticipate any obstacles to achieving your goal – internal barriers (anger, lack of training) and external barriers (no transportation, lack the right tools) and come up with contingency plans (Plan B) for each obstacle.
5. Break your goal down into the action steps needed to achieve the goal. (Example: Goal – Get a raise: (1) preparing my case/points for deserving a raise; (2) practicing and/or role-playing how I will present my points to the boss; (3) making an appointment to meet with the boss; (4) going to the appointment and presenting my case to the boss.)



6. If a step still seems overwhelming, break it down into even smaller and more manageable steps. (Example: Goal – Straighten up my unruly garage (as part of a larger goal of organizing the house and ridding it of clutter). It may seem overwhelming staring at the entire messed up garage, so instead decide to focus only on one small corner and begin there. Then proceed to another specific section.

### **III. CARRY OUT YOUR ACTION PLAN:**

1. Plan a specific timetable to achieve each small step. (*ex. by Saturday I will write down my case/talking points for a raise. By Sunday I will role play/practice delivering my case. By Monday I will request an appointment to speak with the boss.*)
2. Next, carry out each step in the proper timeframe.
3. Be mindful of not allowing yourself to procrastinate or avoid carrying out the steps within the designated timeframe.

### **IV: EVALUATE YOUR EFFORTS:**

1. Evaluate how successful you have been. Be sure to evaluate your behaviors, not your self-worth.
2. If you have fully achieved your goal, this suggests that you have been realistic about your expectations and you should give yourself a pat on the back.
3. If you have not achieved your goal, this suggests that you may have been unrealistic or have made the steps too big. Either way you need to review your plan.
  - Try breaking the goal down into even smaller steps
  - Consult with someone you trust who might be able to help you determine if your goal is realistic and well-defined.
  - Try to evaluate any internal barriers that may have contributed to failing to reach your goal – denial, low self-esteem, codependency, lack of knowledge or training, lack of energy or focus.
  - If you have a pattern of failing to achieve your goals, then obtain counseling or medical help to assist in uncovering physical or emotional barriers to goal achievement. Examples:
    - ADHD, poor concentration, easily distracted, poor organizational or time management skills
    - anxiety, avoidance, procrastination, fear of success, fear of failure
    - depression, low self-esteem, fatigue, lack of motivation, hopelessness, mood instability
    - unrealistic expectations, distorted views of reality, personality disorders, grandiosity, sense of entitlement
    - unconscious self-sabotaging traits or patterns
    - addictions, compulsive behaviors, perfectionism
    - learning disabilities or cognitive impairments
    - physical illnesses, chemical imbalances

# When to Let a Goal Go

It's a bummer when hard work doesn't pay off, especially since we're taught that success doesn't come knocking on a quitter's door. But doggedly pursuing a futile goal can be self-defeating. Ed Brodow, author of *Beating the Success Trap*, says asking yourself these three questions can help you decide if it's time to throw in the towel:



## **1. HAVE I DONE ALL I CAN?**

When you've exhausted every outlet you can think of—to no avail—it's time to redirect your energies. "Put that goal on the back burner for a while," says Brodow. "If it haunts you, you can always come back to it later when you're more experienced and therefore have a better chance of success."



## **2. WHOSE GOAL IS IT REALLY?**

If you're actually pursuing someone else's dream for you (read: a parent's), it's time to stop spinning your wheels. "When you allow others to dictate your dreams, your focus is on pleasing them instead of figuring out what makes you happy," warns Brodow.



## **3. HOW LONG SHOULD I PURSUE THE GOAL BEFORE GIVING UP?**

"If you can't visualize yourself chasing after it a year from now, they you're wasting your energy," says Brodow. "Fast-forwarding to the relatively near future helps you realize what's truly important in your life and will immediately put you on track to start working toward it."