

# Making the Holidays More Positive



**H**olidays are joyful times of festive celebrations with family and friends.

And yet for many, that image is far from reality. Loss, loneliness, and nostalgia can make holidays difficult for many people. Some people dread the holidays in secret, and they feel guilty about it.

## So, What Gives?

**T**he very thought of the holiday season can send many into a funk. Why? Holidays are often filled with memories that become glorified as time passes, linked to loved ones no longer are in your life. Divorce, death and distance are especially painful at this time. If you feel the holidays bearing down on you, you need to plan ahead.

## Quick Quiz

Take the following quiz to see if you could fall victim to the holiday blues. If you answer "yes" to any of the questions, you may heed the following tips.

— Does the thought of holiday celebrations and customs make you feel sad instead of excited?

— Do you have a support system to help you thrive instead of just surviving the holidays?

— Can you create a memorable holiday for yourself instead of stress and depression?

## Ten Steps

**1 Set Realistic Expectations.** Most holiday depression is caused by unrealistic expectations. Will you be the receiver of holiday joy or the giver? Plan how to achieve that goal and keep your expectations in mind, no matter what image is promoted by the media.

**2 Set a Budget.** How much money will you devote to this holiday? Avoid going into debt that might make you feel guilty and depressed. Plan, shop sales, compromise and stick to your budget.

**3 Avoid Hectic Schedules.** Get enough rest. Sit down with family and discuss your calendar. Choose and eliminate. Buy treats within budget instead of always baking and making.

**4 Regroup and Revitalize.** Set aside time for your favorite holiday story or movie. Create your own holiday environment, one with new traditions that will sustain, nurture and calm you. Use lots of lights to balance the shorter days.

**5 Make Plans. Get Structure!** Check the newspaper for house walks and community song-fests. Plan your own party. Include those who've lost spouses or whose families are far away. Plan a fun post-holiday activity to look forward to later.

**6 Avoid Family Differences.** Heal past hurts through forgiveness or "letting go." Share fun stories of family members now gone. Build an oral history to pass down with love and appreciation.

**7 Help Those Less Fortunate.** Visit a nursing home or help a less fortunate family. Volunteer at a shelter or soup kitchen. Make a list of blessings. Include challenges that may have built new strengths.

**8 Cultivate Spirituality.** Recognize and explore your spiritual beliefs during this season. Honor your customs and the beliefs behind them. Share and discuss them with family and friends.

**9 Avoid Excesses.** Don't eat or drink too much. Practice moderation with holiday favorites. Stick with a healthy, high protein diet. Keep your blood sugar stable to avoid mood swings.

**10 And If All Else Fails ...** If these tips don't help you feel better about the anticipated stress brought about by the holiday season, try searching the Web for "holiday depression tips." You'll discover that you are not alone and that a virtual library exists on this subject. Don't hesitate or fall victim to rejecting the idea of professional counseling! Although you may see and hear the excitement of others, professional counselors know it is not that way for everyone. *Act* to feel better, and capture the energy and excitement *of the future* as you face the coming New Year.