How to Handle Post Holiday Depression

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Managing Your Depression After the Holiday Season

The holiday season is time of joy and cheer. The air is buzzing with excitement and love from Thanksgiving through to New Year's Eve. But now the time with family, the holiday cheer, and the spark of hope that comes with New Year's Eve is all over. Suddenly all that's waiting in the near future are a few dull, wet and grey months.

For some the holidays aren't all that they're cracked up to be, but for others, like myself, it's in the downtime after the holidays when I can feel myself slipping. So now what?

Recognizing Your State

I'm sure you've heard the saying, "The first step to solving any problem is recognizing there is one." This is true for those that suffer with depression as well.

Being aware of your mental state and knowing the symptoms to look for can help to identify what's really going on. Ignoring the feelings or expecting them to go away on their own doesn't work and can only exacerbate the problem.

If you have been diagnosed for a while, you likely know how your depression manifests itself so you know which behaviors to watch for. It may help to ask your friends and loved ones to notify you if they notice certain patterns — sometimes you can't see the big picture when you're in the middle of it.

Could It Be Seasonal Affective Disorder?

If you only experience these depressive episodes during the fall and winter months you may have seasonal affective disorder (SAD). SAD is a type of depression that coincides with the changes of the season; typically beginning in the fall and winter months and ending around spring. It more commonly affects women, but a great deal of men can be affected as well.

It's normal for people to be a bit down during the winter months because of a decrease in sunlight and the cold temperatures that keep us seeking warmth at home, but if you feel any of the following symptoms for extended periods of time or can't find the motivation or energy to do the daily tasks or engage in hobbies you enjoy it may be time to see your doctor.

Common symptoms of SAD are:

- Irritability
- Fatigue or low energy
- Changes in sleep patterns — typically sleeping more than usual

- Changes in appetite — typically more hungry or experiencing cravings for comfort food such as complex carbs and sweets
- Weight gain
- Decreased libido

Ways to Fight Depression After the Holidays

Whether it's SAD or you're experiencing a depressive episode, there are ways to combat the negative feelings and physical effects of depression. It may take one or more methods of treatment before you find yourself feeling healthy and happy again, but it's important to find activities and coping methods that work for you.

Next page: atmosphere, light therapy, and more ways to fight depression after the holidays.

Ways to Fight Depression After the Holidays

Atmosphere

It may seem trivial in the grand scheme of things, but I find that creating the right atmosphere helps. The months following the holidays and going into early spring are known for being drab and cold so I find having warm-toned lights in your favorite room of the house can help to create a nicer, more inviting atmosphere.

If you love your Christmas lights and aren't ready to take them down just yet, then don't! Find a way to make your space as uplifting as you can. This may encourage you to work at daily tasks or projects inside the house.

Light Therapy Boxes

Light therapy boxes are aimed more towards those who suffer from SAD but can work for anyone experiencing feelings of depression — especially in the darker winter months. A light box mimics natural, outdoor light and can help your body regulate the chemicals that could be affecting your depression:

Melatonin: a hormone within the body that plays a large role in sleep patterns and your biological clock – also known as circadian rhythm.
Serotonin: a brain chemical that affects mood.

By using a light therapy box for a minimum of 30 minutes a day, your body will be exposed to enough extra light to increase the above mentioned chemicals to promote mood stabilization. When purchasing a light therapy box, be sure to find one that's intended for use by those with depression or SAD.

Exercise

Often times when you're depressed you feel less motivated or fatigued, which could lead to an extended amount of time in bed or on the couch. The best way to improve your energy levels and break the habit is to force yourself to exercise.

Even if it's just 15 minutes of movement several times a day, it will boost your endorphins and serotonin levels which will help to stabilize your mood.

Exercise doesn't have to be weight lifting or going for a run if that's not going to keep you motivated. Find a movement activity you enjoy so you're more likely to do it often.

I find yoga helps because it can be relaxing as well as challenging depending on the style. Swimming, dancing, Pilates, and even going for a walk are great ways to get out of the house and continue to be active.

Healthy Diet

As previously mentioned, one of the symptoms of depression as well as SAD is a change in appetite or cravings for carb-heavy foods. Consuming high levels of sugars and complex carbs can negatively affect your blood sugar, which will in turn affect your mood.

Next page: medications and therapies to help fight off depression.

Ways to Fight Depression After the Holidays

The best way to beat this symptom is by maintaining a healthy diet full of whole foods such as fruits, vegetables, nuts and grains. This will help to fuel your body with the nutrients and energy that it needs. There are some delicious and healthy modifications too so you can feel like you're indulging without straying too far from the path.

Medication and Therapy

If you feel your usual methods of coping or the previously suggested methods won't be enough, talk to your doctor about possibly getting set up with medication or a therapist. There are many types of antidepressants available so it may take some time to find one that works and get adjusted to it — it's not a quick fix but could provide a great deal of support long term.

If you're not interested in medication, haven't found one that helps, or are looking for something in addition to other depression treatments, therapy has many benefits. Similar to medication, there are a few different types of therapy available.

Some types of therapy include:

Cognitive Behavioral Therapy

Cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) has proven to be very effective for the treatment of depression and its symptoms. CBT focuses on the negative thoughts and feelings and works toward retraining your brains way of thinking. With the help of a CBT therapist you can find ways of recognizing negative thought patterns and replace them with a healthier way of thinking.

Psychotherapy

Psychotherapy is likely what you immediately think of when someone mentions therapy. It's a series of one on one sessions with a trained therapist who will help you to identify and breakdown the causes of your depression so that you may learn to overcome them. You'll learn ways of coping and problem solving techniques so that you can regain a positive mentality.

Group Therapy

Group therapy may often get lumped in with psychotherapy, but it's a bit different for the obvious reason that instead of being one-on-one with your chosen therapist you would be in a supportive group environment. One of the benefits of this type of therapy is you get to meet like-minded people who are experiencing similar emotions as you. It's a great way to possibly make new friends, learn from others' experiences, and gain some outside perspective.

With any form of treatment or therapy it's important to find a method that works for you. This may require some trial and error that can be frustrating but sooner or later you'll find something that you enjoy.

So the hype and buzz of the holiday season are over, and you feel yourself dreading the months to come or start to recognize some depressive habits. There are ways of keeping active, positive and healthy in the months to come.

For many people, multiple forms of treatment are needed to regain their motivation and stabilize their mood. It can be frustrating searching for the right method but you’re on the right track if you find something that enjoy and feel that you can be consistent with.