

Navigating the Holiday Blues

Some Tips from the STARR Advocacy Board

The term "Holiday Blues" typically refers to feelings of sadness, loneliness, or increased stress that some individuals may experience during holiday seasons. There are ways to move the needle—you just need to figure out what works best for you. Your mood can shift with a little effort, making the holiday season brighter for you and those around you.

Actions to Ease Holiday Blues

1. **Engage in self-care practices** such as maintaining a regular sleep schedule, exercising regularly, and eating nutritious meals can positively impact mood. Also, limit your alcohol intake, and try not to keep it readily available around your house. If you're attending a party and you know alcohol will be accessible, limit yourself to one or two drinks. Drinking to excess can affect your mood and amplify any negative feelings that you may have.
2. **Add small, pleasant activities to your life.** Making time every day to do something that brings you a little joy—whether that's grabbing coffee at the local café, talking to a friend, quilting, or watching a sunset—can help balance the difficulties of the holidays with more positive experiences.
3. **Move your body**—even if it's just a little. Exercise of any kind—walking, biking, weightlifting, dancing—is proven to be mood-boosting and is important for overall health, too.
4. **Organize your space.** Cleaning is exercise and a good way to feel a sense of accomplishment, so take some time to declutter and reorganize your belongings. Donate old clothes to a homeless shelter. Use this time to clean your cupboards and decide what you want to keep and what you want to discard. Keep in mind that local charities accept donations of most household items... so not only are you decluttering but you're also doing something good for your community!
5. **Practice self-compassion.** Making yourself more aware of your feelings and thoughts and learning to accept them (rather than just pushing them away) can help some people manage their moods. And, in the midst of your suffering, it can be good to remember that others feel this way, too, and to offer yourself kindness.
6. **Connect with other people.** Sometimes, we just need to stop avoiding social interactions and start connecting with people—friends, family, neighbors, colleagues, even strangers. Try calling an old friend, asking a colleague to coffee, waving at your neighbor, or greeting your local grocer or mail carrier. These small interactions can make you happier.
7. **Let someone know how you are feeling.** Just expressing aloud your emotions can often be so freeing. Practice identifying and working through your emotions by letting someone in your life know what is going on. They may be able to relate to how you feel or offer support.
8. **Give thanks for small blessings.** Try starting a gratitude journal, where you write down a few small things you feel grateful for every day. Don't try to be grateful for things you're not happy about, though—you don't have to paint a smiley face on difficult things. But look for the small, good things in your life—like a delicious cup of coffee, your pet's soft fur, a beautiful winter sky, or your child's goofy grin—and say thanks to yourself for those small blessings.
9. **Set healthy boundaries.** Say "no" and do not overcommit. Make time for alone time, leave space for grief if you need it. Evaluate traditions; let go of traditions that no longer serve you and make new ones that align with a healthy state of mind if needed.
10. **Volunteering or helping others.** You could volunteer to deliver meals to the hungry, sing for people in a nursing home, or visit lonely neighbors. Especially if you're unable to be with friends or family this holiday, look for volunteer opportunities that allow you to be around others. Some non-profits will even come pick you up if you're unable to drive. Helping others helps lift your mood to feel like you're doing something purposeful, something that makes others feel happy.
11. **Seek professional support.** Talking to a therapist is never a bad idea and may be especially helpful to work through some of the things that make the holidays less cheerful for you.