

Seniors and Post-Holiday Blues: *Why it Happens & What to Do*

As the end of the holidays approaches, many people feel relief knowing the hustle and bustle is nearly done. Yet the day after decorations are packed away and the leftovers are in the freezer, surprisingly that relief can be replaced with feelings of depression, especially for seniors. Older adults are more likely to have difficulty with both pre- and post-holiday blues if they are more isolated from family and friends. Seniors are also more likely to be suffering from ill health, which can exacerbate feelings of depression that may arise after the holidays. According to the American Geriatrics Society, seniors may also feel blue after the holidays if they are facing money issues, and spent beyond a budget.

For seniors, the holidays bring up feelings of loss and loneliness for a spouse or close friends who

have passed. If it's the first holiday season one faces without his or her spouse or a life-long friend, that pain is still fresh.



Go out or invite others in

Though it may be difficult to make plans to attend events and socialize if one is feeling blue, this is the time when reaching out matters most. Even a small get together can contribute to a happier outlook on the New Year ahead. If one's health prevents traveling,

invite friends over for a simple gathering. It can make all the difference as can connecting with grandkids while they have vacations from school--even if it's by phone, email or Skype. Seniors can also benefit from taking time to talk about their feelings after the holidays, whether with others at a senior center or church, or with a geriatric counselor. Often times just talking about sadness helps one understand it better and feel more in control.

The holidays can be exhausting at any age, but for seniors, travelling, shopping, cooking and decorating can take a much bigger toll than it once did. It is important to note that exhaustion sometimes feels like depression, so seniors should schedule more opportunities to nap or simply get a little extra rest.

Here are some ways seniors can help alleviate the post-holiday blues:

Plan a getaway in February or March, especially some place warm. It doesn't have to be a big, expensive trip to keep one's spirits up and looking forward.

Make a plan to learn something new. It can be anything from yoga exercises a person can do in a chair to learning about the computer.

Work with family members to create visible memories of the holiday season. Collecting favorite photos and cards, and telling stories about the photos is not only entertaining, but preserves the history of a family.

Consider taking decorations down slowly rather than all at once. Leave a wreath on the door, or garland along a bannister.

The American Geriatric Society Foundation for Health in Aging recommends volunteering as a way to ease the post-holiday blues. This organization suggests calling the United Way or one's church to learn about others who need help. One need not make a long-term, formal commitment to have a positive impact.

When it's more than the blues

- Sometimes feelings of depression are more than just the post-holiday blues. Below are some symptoms that may warrant treatment by a doctor.
- Inability to sleep, or excessive sleeping

- Significant loss or gain of weight
- Difficulty thinking and concentrating, or indecisiveness
- Feelings of worthlessness or guilt
- Severe fatigue or loss of energy

Those who are experiencing these symptoms should consult a doctor or a clinical counselor right away.

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