

## What is Holiday Depression?

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Holiday depression can be a combination of several emotional/mental health factors that come together to create or worsen symptoms just before, during, or after the holidays. It is largely the “holiday season” timing of the appearance of, or worsening of symptoms that leads to the label “holiday depression. Many people who experience chronic depression find that their depression worsens around the holidays.

There are a number of reasons that people get more depressed during the holidays.

- As stress goes up, it challenges our resources to keep it appropriately managed or under control. Sometimes a person’s resources are inadequate to the pile up and increase in intensity of the stressors. People may become overwhelmed.
- Some people are dealing with unresolved loss and grief in addition to holiday stressors. The holidays also represent a time of increased intensity of grief, as memories of the lost loved ones come flooding back.
- Many people experience Seasonal Affective Disorder, which happens during the winter months when the days are shorter and there is less sunlight.
- The holidays are also a time when many people’s priorities shift. Many depressed people are able to successfully managing their depression with medication and/or exercise, appropriate self-care, socializing, counseling, or other activities. As the demands to accomplish more and more during the holidays, appropriate self-care activities may decrease. As these depression management techniques recede, depression symptoms may increase.

How can you tell if it is Holiday Depression or something more serious? A mental health professional can help you sort that out. Many times, uncomplicated holiday depression can be reduced or managed by stepping up your self care, reducing your stress, and using a social support system.

Help is available for holiday depression. For many, counseling is appropriate. For others, a visit to your family physician and a prescription for an antidepressant may be appropriate. Often a more effective approach could be medication along with counseling. Your doctor can assess for seasonal affective disorder, as well.

There are grief support groups available to those who are grieving. Remember that grief has no statute of limitations. People usually grieve as long as they need to. When intense grief persists over an exceptionally long time, it could be complicated bereavement and counseling would be appropriate.

Holiday depression can be reduced or effectively managed by taking pro-active steps.