

December 2024

## The Holiday Season And Your Mental Health

The holidays are supposed to be a time of joy and laughter with family and friends. While the majority of us are involved in merriment, there is a portion of the population that experiences little joy or exuberance over the holiday season. For these folks the holidays can be dreary, sad, or even isolating. The holidays can often serve to accentuate feelings of loss or symptoms of depression.

If you or someone you know is prone to suffering, what follows are few helpful hints to set a course for healing:

**Preparation can result in prevention** - Planning ahead can really make a difference. If for example, the holidays make you feel lonely due to a recent loss of a loved one, or perhaps a divorce or separation, consider taking a day trip to visit a friend or relative. The change of venue can do a lot to lift your mood.

**Stay Active** - Although the last thing you may feel like doing is keeping active, a packed schedule can really take your mind off feelings of loneliness and/or depression. Engage in activities you typically enjoy even if you are not feeling your best. Try to fit in some exercise, which boosts the 'happy chemicals' in the brain, known as endorphins, that will ultimately improve your mood and sense of wellbeing. Try and make the effort to engage in some form of exercise every day, even if this is just going for a short walk.

**Keep in the company of others** - If you don't have a group of friends or family to spend time with, find situations which offer companionship. Join the local library book club, contact the local food bank or soup kitchen and volunteer your time. Although you may have to push yourself to connect with others, once you are engaged you are likely to forget the initial discomfort.

**Consider taking a break from social media** - Social media has

interconnected much of the world and can be a great way to keep in touch with friends and family. However, with increasing use, social media has the potential to have a negative effect on mental health. Social media can increase stress levels and have a detrimental impact on mood as they often cause us to compare our lives to the lives of other people. Therefore, when you see others seemingly perfect day-to-day lives, this can lead you to feel inadequate. During this holiday season try stepping away from or limiting your social media accounts. You might find that you're able to spend an increasing amount of quality time with your family and friends and enjoy your leisure time more.

**Healthy habits can help you heal** - The connection between mind and body is a strong one. This is why it is particularly important that when you experience holiday blues you pay special attention to your body. Begin by getting enough hours of rest and going out of your way to eat healthy. Not only does this have obvious physical health benefits, but a healthy diet that's full of vitamins and nutrients can also have positive effects on your mental health. Research suggests that foods that are rich in folic acid (such as avocado and spinach), and omega-3 acids (such as salmon and tuna), can improve your mood and lower stress and anxiety. It's so easy when we're feeling stressed or low to reach for the junk food, but you can help to alleviate some of these negative feelings by simply eating well.

A case of the holiday blues can be difficult to deal with. When you focus on taking care of yourself and allowing others to do the same, you offer yourself the best opportunity to engage in the joy of the holiday season.

**Seek help and support** - If you find that you are struggling with your mental health, the first step in healing is learning to let others help you. Turn to a trusted friend or relative to talk with or a mental health professional can help you overcome challenges and take steps towards the healthy and fulfilling life that you deserve.

**About Four Winds....** *Four Winds Hospitals are located on two serene campuses in New York State. Four Winds Westchester is 50 minutes north of midtown Manhattan. Four Winds Saratoga is located in Saratoga Springs, 30 minutes north of Albany. Four Winds Hospitals is a leading provider of specialized inpatient and outpatient behavioral health services for children, adolescents and adults.*

Four Winds Westchester  
800 Cross River Road  
Katonah, New York 10536  
914-763-8151

Four Winds Saratoga  
30 Crescent Avenue  
Saratoga Springs, New York 12866  
518-584-3600