

Happy Holidays

Coping with the Holidays

From Penny Sitler, Executive Director of Mental Health America of Licking County
The holidays are a time of peace, togetherness and joy, right? Then why are so many people stressed out more now than any other time of year? There are several factors at work and we have suggestions to help minimize the effects on how you feel.

We put a lot of pressure on ourselves to make everything perfect for the holidays – the decorations, food, gifts, etc. Don't be too hard on yourself. Ask for help with the shopping, wrapping, baking and other preparations. Part of the joy of the holiday is being together so have a friend or family member help get everything ready. You can turn what feels like work into a fun time that will become a cherished memory to remind you of the joy of the holidays.

The holidays can cost a lot of money but they don't have to. If you don't have money to spare, enjoy the things that don't cost anything. Share in the beauty of others' decorations by doing a tour of neighborhood lighting displays. The Licking County Courthouse is a beautifully lit gem at this time of year that you can enjoy by walking around the courthouse square. Bundle up and take a walk in the snow or take your children sledding. The exercise and fresh air will do you good and there's nothing prettier than a fresh snowfall. The stores are all dressed up for the holidays. Head to the local mall and walk the hallways while enjoying the sights and sounds of the season. If you need help providing food for your family or yourself, there are so many opportunities to eat a holiday meal at area churches. The food pantries are also well stocked for holiday needs. Perhaps you don't have family close by and you're feeling sad or lonely. If you feel isolated during the holidays, take steps to join in activities that are happening all over the community. Ask a neighbor or friend if they need help with gift wrapping or clearing a walkway. If you know of someone who is alone during this time, invite him/her to a meal or other gathering. There are lots of volunteer opportunities at agencies, churches, etc. during the holidays. You can help serve a meal, purchase and organize gifts or deliver items. Helping someone in need is a great way to lift your mood, and you'll be working side by side with others as well. You never know – one of those people may become a new friend.

The weather and lack of sunshine can affect your mood. We all need a little sunshine in our lives to keep up our spirits. Putting brighter than usual light bulbs in a lamp and sitting near or under it will help. We often feel cooped up during the winter months. Even if there is snow on the ground, put on some warm boots and get outside for a walk every day. Exercise will help you feel better and more energetic.

To make the most of the holidays, be sure to eat well, get plenty of rest and exercise, and take time to enjoy the beauty of the season. Stress and depression, though common during this time of year, don't have to ruin your joy. Remember to be flexible and willing to change to find new, more satisfying ways of handling the challenges. wishes and happy holidays!

