

# FHA

# THE AGS FOUNDATION FOR HEALTH IN AGING

Expert Information from Healthcare Professionals Who Specialize in the Care of Older Adults

## TIPS FOR BEATING THE HOLIDAY BLUES

It's a time of celebration, parties, and get-togethers, but sometimes the holiday season can also be a source of the blues, especially for older people. Older adults may think about how quickly time has passed, or miss loved ones more during this time of year. Health conditions or concerns about money can also make it harder to enjoy the holidays. Fortunately, there are ways to help cope with the melancholy that may accompany the holidays. The AGS Foundation for Health in Aging offers the following tips. ■

For more on depression in older adults visit the American Geriatrics Society's Foundation for Health in Aging's website: [www.healthinaging.org](http://www.healthinaging.org).

GET OUT AND ABOUT	Ask family and friends for help traveling to parties and events. Invite family and friends over. Taking a brisk walk in the morning before you begin the day or in the evening to wind down your day is a great way to beat the blues.
VOLUNTEER	Helping others is a great mood lifter. To volunteer contact your local United Way (it's listed in the phone book or check <a href="http://www.unitedway.org">www.unitedway.org</a> ); or call local schools, churches, synagogues or mosques and ask about volunteer opportunities in your neighborhood.
DRINK RESPONSIBLY	It is easy to overindulge around the holidays, but excessive drinking will only make you feel more depressed. One drink = 12 ounces of beer, 5 ounces of wine, or one ounce of hard liquor. The recommended limit for older men is 14 drinks per week and for older women, 7 per week.
ACCEPT YOUR FEELINGS	There's nothing "wrong" with not feeling jolly; many people experience sadness and feelings of loss during the holidays. Be kind to yourself, seek support, and even laugh at yourself every now and then.
TALK TO SOMEONE	Don't underestimate the power of friends, family, mentors, and neighbors. Talk about your feelings; it can help you understand why you feel the way you do. Something as simple as a phone call, a chat over coffee, or a nice e-mail or letter can brighten your mood.

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## Recognize Warning Signs of Depression

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Holiday blues are usually temporary and mild, but depression is more serious and can linger unless you get help. Signs of depression include:

- Sadness that won't lift; loss of interest or pleasure in doing things
- Changes in appetite or weight
- Crying often
- Feeling restless or fidgety
- Feeling worthless, helpless, or guilty
- Decreased energy, fatigue, being "slowed down"
- Trouble concentrating
- Difficulty falling or staying asleep, or sleeping too much

*Depression is treatable. Seek professional help if you experience five or more of these symptoms every day for two weeks. If you have recurring thoughts of death or suicide, you should get help immediately.*

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## How to Help Someone with the Holiday Blues

INCLUDE THEM	Invite them out and to get-togethers. Take into account their needs, such as transportation or special diets.
LEND A HAND	Offer to help someone with their cleaning, shopping, cooking, and other preparations for get-togethers in their homes.
BE A GOOD LISTENER	Be a supportive listener and encourage discussions about feelings and concerns. Acknowledge "difficult" feelings, including a sense of loss if family or friends have died or moved away. Try to put yourself in the other person's shoes to understand how they feel.
ENCOURAGE HIM OR HER TO TALK WITH A HEALTHCARE PROVIDER	The holidays can cause people to feel anxious and depressed, but for some, holiday tensions can lead to full-blown clinical depression. In fact, many older adults don't realize they are depressed. If you suspect depression in someone you know, you may need to bring it up more than once. Let the person know that depression is a treatable medical illness and is not something to be ashamed of.