

# Mental Minutes

December, 2009

Volume 1 Issue 4

## Depression during the Holidays

It's that time of year again...you're stocking up on all your Thanksgiving goodies, making your shopping list and checking it twice, and driving yourself absolutely crazy in the process!!! The holiday season should be a joyous experience but some of us are so anxious about family gatherings, weight gain, time-management, and budgeting that we overwhelm ourselves, causing feelings of stress and depression.

According to Mitchel A. Kling, M.D., an associate professor of psychiatry and medicine at the University of Maryland School of Medicine, , symptoms including fatigue, depressed mood, or sadness, occurring for more than two weeks, require professional attention. More specifically, people who experience five or more of the following symptoms are at high risk for depression and should seek professional help:

- \* Persistent sad, anxious, or "empty" mood
- \* Feelings of hopelessness, pessimism
- \* Feelings of guilt, worthlessness, helplessness
- \* Loss of interest or pleasure in hobbies and activities that were once enjoyed, including sex
- \* Decreased energy, fatigue, being "slowed down"
- \* Difficulty concentrating, remembering, making decisions
- \* Insomnia, early-morning awakening, or oversleeping
- \* Appetite and/or weight loss or overeating and weight gain
- \* Thoughts of death or suicide; suicide attempts
- \* Restlessness, irritability
- \* Persistent physical symptoms that do not respond to treatment, such as headaches, digestive disorders, and chronic pain

See full article at: [http://www.umm.edu/news/releases/holiday-stress\\_december-11.htm](http://www.umm.edu/news/releases/holiday-stress_december-11.htm)

### Did you know???

With some practical tips, you can learn to recognize common holiday triggers, so you can disarm them before they lead to a meltdown:

**Relationships.** Relationships can cause turmoil, conflict or stress at any time, but tensions are often heightened during the holidays. Family misunderstandings and conflicts can intensify — especially if you're thrust together for several days. On the other hand, facing the holidays without a loved one can be tough and leave you feeling lonely and sad.

**Finances.** With the added expenses of gifts, travel, food and entertainment, the holidays can put a strain on your budget — and your peace of mind. Not to mention that overspending now can mean financial worries for months to come.

**Physical demands.** Even die-hard holiday enthusiasts may find that the extra shopping and socializing can leave them wiped out. Being exhausted increases your stress, creating a vicious cycle. Exercise and sleep — good antidotes for stress and fatigue — may take a back seat to chores and errands. To top it off, burning the wick at both ends makes you more susceptible to colds and other unwelcome guests.



Source: <http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/stress/MH00030/NSECTIONGROUP=2>

### \*\*\*Dedication\*\*\*

We would all like to recognize our Leaders, Jeff Atkinson and Cassandra Johnson-Landry!!! For your tireless efforts and your dedication to this agency and all the lives it touches. We love you both and will continue to "blaze the path" as you hold the torch to lead us!!!

### "Mental-Minute"

Can you decipher these common Christmas Carols?

1. Happiness to the Global Ecosystem
2. Small male percussionist
3. I am pontificating of a colorless holiday
4. Festoon the Corridors
5. A Non-summer fairytale area
6. Oh holiday conifer
7. Ten plus two twenty-four hour periods of holiday festivity
8. Hey tiny city in Israel
9. In a remote location in a barn stall

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## Family Feud: Holiday Edition

Struggling to be polite. Straining to smile. Steering clear of potential arguments. Ah, the holiday family gathering. For millions of Americans, these annual pilgrimages to the old homestead are loaded with more stress than a high-tension cable on the Golden Gate Bridge. Longstanding sibling rivalries, tensions between in-laws, drunk uncles, nitpicking aunts and the ritual criticisms (When are you going to have children? When are you going to get a better job?) can make the trip less desirable than coal in your stocking. But don't despair. As an early holiday gift, we've put together a nice (not naughty) list of things you can do to help survive - and even thrive in - these family gatherings. And best of all, you can get started right away:

### 1) Practice Makes Perfect

Psychologist John C. Friel, co-author of "Adult Children: The Secrets of Dysfunctional Families" (HCI, 1988) with wife, Linda D. Friel, says now is the time to start working on your talking points. "One of the things I tell families is that from November 1st to January 2nd, you need to practice your conversational skills," says Friel, who works in Reno, Nevada and St. Paul, Minn. "It's the small talk that is the emotional glue that keeps people and families together." "Before you leave for the family gathering, a week or two before, start calling up a few relatives to chat about how their lives are going, make good connections with them before you arrive. E-mail can work as well as text messaging," says Kate Gaston, vice president of affiliates services and relations for Mental Health America, Alexandria, Va. "What you are doing is building your 'gathering' of friends and family before you get to the event." If you're sure to be facing people who have caused you pain in the past, Gaston suggests playing out a few scenarios beforehand. "Play act with a best friend, practice how you want to respond when you are not in the elements of the moment," Gaston says. You may also want to "consider how you are going to successfully not be in the same room, seated at the same table or sharing the same space."

### 2) Make The First Move

Annoying, mocking and challenging people at family gatherings, Gaston says, are often looking for attention. So consider giving it to them right away. "Immediately approach them and say hello and keep them talking for five minutes about what they have been doing in the past year, months, etc.," Gaston says. "In other words, give them your undivided attention, pay a couple of compliments, say you are glad they are there and then slowly and quietly bring someone else into the conversation while you slip off to 'help in the kitchen' or 'unload the car' or 'take a call.' You've built a moment that is 'all about them' because that is what they want anyway, and then you've moved on to another person with a smile on your face."

### 3) Steer Clear of Danger

Should this person, or another, continue to bother or annoy you during the course of the family gathering, Friel says almost everyone is capable of being steered in a different direction. "So if somebody were to say, 'Gee Jeff, are you gonna eat that second piece of pie?' You can go for a one-two count, kind of stare off into space and start discussing whether the Vikings are going to win the Super Bowl or not," Friel says. "Or, if you get really good at it, you can look right at them and say, 'I'll answer that in a second, but I've been meaning to ask you, how is that new job going? Or how is your puppy?' Steer the conversation towards another direction or gently nudge the conversation back into their court instead of slamming it in their face."

See full article at: [http://bodyandmore.auburnpub.com/health\\_20081121\\_familyfeud.html](http://bodyandmore.auburnpub.com/health_20081121_familyfeud.html)



## Holiday Blues

Oh boy, another gathering; will they notice if I go upstairs? I just want to crawl into a hole; I want to be anywhere but here...

Christmas trees, gifts, family, and friends...It's all going great, but when does it end?

I'm tired of the lights, the eggnog, the smiles; I don't want anymore hugs, just want time to fly

Oh, I forgot to buy her a gift. Will she be upset? I knew he was coming too, how could I forget?

Maybe if I'd slept, I wouldn't feel so down And this headache, my goodness...how do I smile through my frown?

Maybe I need a drink, on second thought maybe not! Uncle Jim's had one too many and he's not lookin' too hot...

"Mommy, come sing with us!" Not now kids...mom's a mess! I don't know how I got out of bed this morning, much less managed to get dressed!

"Oh, you did such a great job with the party. Did you cook all this food yourself?" Yeah, yeah, just save it! Accolades do nothing for my health!

"No little Sammy, you'll break it. Just leave it alone!" And now everyone's looking at me...maybe you all should just GO HOME!!!

Their faces are cross and they all look confused. Well I could care less; they don't have the blues...

All this celebration and cheer, it doesn't appeal to me. In plain view of all these people and not one of them can see...

While they converse and dance, eat and have a good time...I just want to be alone, is that such a crime?

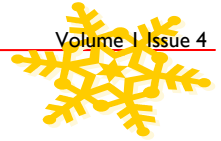
My goodness, now he's crying...what have I done? That's not what I wanted, now the blues have won!

Pull yourself together, it's time to regroup! What were you thinking? Being the Grinch isn't you!

Yes, it's been hectic and you haven't had a moment to stop; yes, you didn't think you'd make it because your head felt like it would POP!

Yes, you want to leave even though the party is in your home; and yes, you want to scream and you wish that it were done!

But this isn't you, don't let the blues win! This is the holiday season...This is where the love of family begins!



## Self-Care Corner ~ Stress, depression and the holidays: 10 tips for coping



**Stress and depression can ruin your holidays and hurt your health. Being realistic, planning ahead and seeking support can help ward off stress and depression.**

**Acknowledge your feelings.** If someone close to you has recently died or you can't be with loved ones, realize that it's normal to feel sadness and grief. It's OK to take time to cry or express your feelings. You can't force yourself to be happy just because it's the holiday season.

**Reach out.** If you feel lonely or isolated, seek out community, religious or other social events. They can offer support and companionship. Volunteering your time to help others also is a good way to lift your spirits and broaden your friendships.

**Be realistic.** The holidays don't have to be perfect or just like last year. As families change and grow, traditions and rituals often change as well. Choose a few to hold on to, and be open to creating new ones. For example, if your adult children can't come to your house, find new ways to celebrate together, such as sharing pictures, emails or videotapes.

**Set aside differences.** Try to accept family members and friends as they are, even if they don't live up to all your expectations. Set aside grievances until a more appropriate time for discussion. And be understanding if others get upset or distressed when something goes awry. Chances are they're feeling the effects of holiday stress and depression too.

**Stick to a budget.** Before you go gift and food shopping, decide how much money you can afford to spend. Then stick to your budget. Don't try to buy happiness with an avalanche of gifts. Try these alternatives: Donate to a charity in someone's name, give homemade gifts or start a family gift exchange.

**Plan ahead.** Set aside specific days for shopping, baking, visiting friends and other activities. Plan your menus and then make your shopping list. That'll help prevent last-minute scrambling to buy forgotten ingredients. And make sure to line up help for party prep and cleanup.

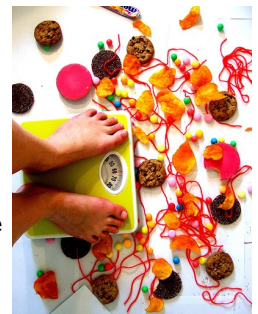
**Learn to say no.** Saying yes when you should say no can leave you feeling resentful and overwhelmed. Friends and colleagues will understand if you can't participate in every project or activity. If it's not possible to say no when your boss asks you to work overtime, try to remove something else from your agenda to make up for the lost time.

**Don't abandon healthy habits.** Don't let the holidays become a free-for-all. Overindulgence only adds to your stress and guilt. Have a healthy snack before holiday parties so that you don't go overboard on sweets, cheese or drinks. Continue to get plenty of sleep and physical activity.

**Take a breather.** Make some time for yourself. Spending just 15 minutes alone, without distractions, may refresh you enough to handle everything you need to do. Take a walk at night and stargaze. Listen to soothing music. Find something that reduces stress by clearing your mind, slowing your breathing and restoring inner calm.

**Seek professional help if you need it.** Despite your best efforts, you may find yourself feeling persistently sad or anxious, plagued by physical complaints, unable to sleep, irritable and hopeless, and unable to face routine chores. If these feelings last for a while, talk to your doctor or a mental health professional.

Source: <http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/stress/MH00030/NSECTIONGROUP=2>



Let's Celebrate Gerard Reese as our Staff Star for the month of December!!! Gerard has been with Alliance for Change Through Treatment (ACT) as a Behavioral Specialist since January of 2009. Gerard comes to us from North Carolina where he worked as a Youth Treatment Coordinator for the Drug Court. Additionally, Gerard enjoyed lending himself to community support programs, basketball officiating, and coaching baseball and football. After being with ACT for almost one year, Gerard believes the agency will go "as far as the sky will let us go..." He believes that the biggest change within the agency has been its level of commitment to team building. Gerard stated that "ACT has changed the thought process where it's not just about one person and you can voice your opinion without it being thrown out the window...teamwork has been the best positive change for us."

Gerard's colleagues state that he is always willing to help out, is kind-hearted, diligent, always friendly, and always goes above and beyond. When asked what he believes is his biggest contribution to the agency, Gerard reported that "I just bring the sense of humor out of everyone, even during stressful

### Staff Star



times. I believe that having fun and being positive helps." Where services are concerned, Gerard believes that one of the biggest challenges is "resources to help these young kids...Georgia has so many different programs for adults, but we are limited when it comes to our kids." He remains driven under the circumstances however and asserts that, "if you can see a kid make an "F" and turn it into a "D", it lets you know that you helped to make a small change in a life. I know you're thinking an "F" to a "D" is not much, but understand that any progress is success with our kids and that's what keeps me going."

Gerard maintains a positive outlook and attitude toward his job and reported that he constantly reminds himself, "it's not about money or any personal gain or any community agency, or even being the star worker of the month (don't get me wrong, I'm enjoying it), but it's about the kids and families we work with; making them successful by all means!"

Congratulations on a job well done Gerard! Our families are blessed to have you on their side and we are blessed to have you as part of the ACT family!!!

**Mental Health Georgia** provides an extensive array of mental health services for both children and adults. "Our mission is to provide high-quality, easily accessible services for Georgians, focused on promoting mental and emotional well-being through personal and professional development, family preservation, resource coordination, and individualized treatment.

### Resource Readiness

#### American Psychiatric Association

1000 Wilson Boulevard, Suite 1825  
Arlington, VA 22209-3901  
Toll-free: (888) 35-PSYCH (357-7924)  
Phone: (703) 907-7300  
<http://www.psych.org>

#### American Psychological Association

750 First Street, NE  
Washington, DC 20002-4242  
Toll-free: (800) 374-2721  
Phone: (202) 336-5500  
<http://www.apa.org>

#### Center for Mental Health Services (CMHS) Knowledge Exchange Network (KEN)

P.O. Box 42490  
Washington, DC 20015  
Toll-free: (800) 789-2647  
<http://www.mentalhealth.org>

#### Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance (DBSA)

730 North Franklin Street, Suite 501  
Chicago, IL 60601-7204  
Toll-free: (800) 826-3632  
<http://www.dbsalliance.org>

### Recipe Round-Up: Swirled Cheesecake Brownies



**On a holiday budget? Try wrapping up some of these scrumptious brownies as a healthy gift everyone will be sure to love!!!**

#### Cheesecake topping

- 4 ounces reduced-fat cream cheese, (Neufchatel)
- 1/4 cup sugar
- 1 large egg
- 1 tablespoon all-purpose flour
- 1 tablespoon nonfat plain yogurt
- 1/2 teaspoon vanilla extract

#### Brownie layer

- 2/3 cup whole-wheat pastry flour
- 1/2 cup unsweetened cocoa powder
- 1/4 teaspoon salt
- 1 large egg
- 2 large egg whites, or 4 teaspoons dried egg whites
- 1 1/4 cups packed light brown sugar
- 1/4 cup canola oil
- 1/4 cup strong (or prepared instant) coffee, or black tea
- 2 teaspoons vanilla extract

#### Preparation

Preheat oven to 350° F. Coat a 7-by-11-inch brownie pan or baking pan with cooking spray.

To prepare topping: Place cream cheese in a small mixing bowl and beat with an electric mixer until smooth and creamy. Add sugar and beat until smooth. Add egg, flour, yogurt and vanilla; beat until well blended.

To prepare brownie layer: Whisk whole-wheat flour, cocoa and salt in a bowl. Place egg, egg whites and brown sugar in a large bowl and beat with the electric mixer on medium speed until smooth. Add oil, coffee (or tea) and vanilla; beat until well blended. Add the dry ingredients and beat on low speed just until well blended, stopping once to scrape down the sides.

Scrape about half of the brownie batter into the prepared pan. Slowly pour the cream cheese topping evenly on top. Drop the remaining brownie batter in large dollops over the topping. Draw the tip of a sharp knife or skewer through the two batters to create a swirled effect. Bake the brownies until the top is just firm to the touch, about 20 minutes. Let cool completely in the pan on a wire rack. Coat a knife with cooking spray and cut into 24 bars.

#### Nutrition Information

**Per bar:** 105 calories; 4 g fat (1 g sat, 2 g mono); 21 mg cholesterol; 16 g carbohydrates; 2 g protein; 1 g fiber; 54 mg sodium; 45 mg potassium; 1 Carbohydrate Serving

**Time:** 25 minutes **Total Time:** 2 hours (including cooling time) **Yields:** 24 bars Active

**Source:** [http://www.eatingwell.com/recipes/swirled\\_cheesecake\\_brownies.html](http://www.eatingwell.com/recipes/swirled_cheesecake_brownies.html)



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**We're on the Web!**  
[www.mentalhealthgeorgia.com](http://www.mentalhealthgeorgia.com)

Serving the Mental Health  
Needs of the Residents of  
Georgia.

"Mental-Minute Solution"

1. Joy to the World
2. Little Drummer Boy
3. I'm Dreaming of a White Christmas
4. Deck the Halls
5. Winter Wonderland
6. Oh Christmas Tree
7. 12 Days of Christmas
8. Oh Little Town of Bethlehem
9. Away in a Manger