

Anticipatory grief—a feeling of loss before a death or dreaded event occurs—is a hard journey. Holidays make it even harder. At a time when you’re supposed to feel happy and joyful, you feel sad and anxious. You’re on pins and needles and wonder what will happen next.

Remember, your grief stems from love, and you may find comfort in that. Holidays don’t erase your reasons for feeling sad and lonely, according to the National Mental Health Association, and “there is room for these feelings to be present.” So accept your feelings and, if you feel like crying, go ahead and do it. It will help you feel better.

Here are some other ways you can help yourself:

1

Be realistic

You don’t have to create a “perfect” holiday. Do you really need to knit sweaters for everyone? No. Do you really need to serve a six course meal? No. What you need to do is set realistic goals, get organized, and pace yourself. Rather than focusing on one day, the National Mental Health Association recommends focusing on “a season of holiday sentiment.”

2

Ask For Help

You don’t need to do everything yourself. Family members and friends will be glad to help with planning, decorating and cooking. One family member could bring a traditional dish, such as pumpkin pie. Another family member could provide linens and launder them afterwards. Your request for help makes others feel needed.

3

Budget

Finances can cause stress at any time, but they cause lots of stress during the holidays. Set a budget for gifts, decorations and entertaining. Staying within your budget will make you feel better about the holidays and yourself. Your gifts don’t have to be new. Holidays are a perfect time to pass along family possessions—a flower vase, historic photo or beloved book. Stick a short note about the item in with your gift.

4

Eat Right

Because nutrition affects brain chemistry, you need to eat balanced meals during the holidays. Yummy as they look, pass up the candy and cookies that come your way. Choose lots of fruits and veggies from the buffet table and one dessert. Keeping a supply of healthy snacks on hand will also help you to eat right.

5

Drink Moderately

Alcohol makes the holiday blues worse, according to the National Mental Health Association. Too much alcohol can cause you to say things you’ll regret later. If you drink alcohol, drink in moderation or skip it all together. Drink sparkling cider, non-alcoholic punch or flavored water instead of alcohol.

6

Get Enough Sleep

You're probably thinking, "Yeah, right." But you need sleep to survive the holidays. Getting enough sleep is hard to do with so many holiday events going on. However, you may be selective about what you attend, leave early and get a good night's sleep. Balance a late night with a short nap the next day.

7

Light Your Way

Vanderbilt University wellness experts say more people get depressed during the holidays than at any other time. Some of these people have Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD). If you live in a cold climate and the days are short you may wish to be evaluated for SAD. Phototherapy (intense lighting) is usually recommended for those with SAD. Even if you don't have SAD, well-lit rooms will lift your spirits.

8

Exercise

Daily physical activity is a proven way to cope with stress. Walk around town or the local mall and look at holiday decorations. Play catch with your kids or grandkids. Bundle up and go cross country skiing. A half hour of physical activity per day helps to chase the blues away.

9

Be Conciliatory

According to Mayo Clinic, family tensions may flare during the holidays if members are "thrust together for several days." Holidays aren't the time to settle family disputes, they're a time for conciliatory and kind behavior. Discuss family grievances later.

10

Help Others

Holidays are associated with families and togetherness according to Jill RachBeisel, MD, Director of Community Psychiatry at the University of Maryland. But, due to the divorce rate and fragmented families, many don't have this kind of holiday experience. Still, you may connect with a substitute family by volunteering at a senior center, reading to shut-ins or tutoring children.

11

Make New Memories

The memories you make during this holiday season may comfort you in the future. Take digital photos of holiday events and put them on a CD. Send copies of the CD to all family members. Every family has stories to tell and you may create new memories by tape recording some of these stories. You may also videotape holiday events.

12

Savor the Moment

Though you are sorrowful, you're alive, able to be with those you love and care about. Surround yourself with life: family members, dear friends, colorful flowers, a tail-wagging dog and hobbies that make you happy. For every moment of life—even the sorrowful ones—is a miracle.

(By Harriet Hodgson, Health & Wellness Author)

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