



Feature Column

By Dr. Fay W. Boozman, Director

Keeping Your Hometown Healthy

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RX for Avoiding Holiday Stress and Depression

One of the busiest seasons of the year is upon us. How are you holding up? In the United States, the holiday season is supposed to be a joyous time for all with heart-felt celebrations and warm reunions. Right? Not exactly. That scenario is idealistic, especially in the wake of the events of September 11, and many may find this scene to be more of a myth than a reality.

According to Dr. Frederick Guggenheim, a professor of psychiatry with the University at Arkansas for Medical Sciences, many mental health experts predict a 25 percent increase in psychiatric consultations, attributable to increased levels of stress. *Time* magazine reported that there has also been an increase in anti-anxiety medication prescriptions since the events of September 11.

Symptoms of excessive stress, anxiety and depression include: irritability, headaches, changes in sleeping patterns, over-eating, anorexia, excessive drinking, feelings of being overwhelmed and the inability to cope. Among the ways to deal with these feelings of stress and depression are self-help techniques, psychotherapy or medication. Consult your physician to determine what is best for your situation.

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If world events, holiday duress or the daily grind leave you stressed or depressed, try some of these stress relief activities:

- **Keep things in perspective.** Be thankful for the things in your life that are going well. Be aware of hassles versus stressors.
- **Get physical.** Walk, play, rake leaves and start or continue a regular exercise routine (at least 30 minutes a day of any activity is recommended by the Arkansas Governor's Council on Fitness).
- **Share your stress.** Talk to someone you trust about your concerns and worries. If you think your problems are serious, seek professional help.
- **Get organized.** Make a list and check those tedious tasks off. This might be one of the easiest and most beneficial activities that you can use to reduce the stress in your life.
- **Take care of yourself.** Eat a nutritious diet (plenty of fruit and vegetables) and get enough rest (eight hours if you can). Look for quiet times to mentally rest or organize your thoughts and your schedule.
- **Compromise.** A little give and take will reduce anxiety and allow you to feel more comfortable. Don't feel that everything needs to be perfect all of the time.
- **Give your time and get involved.** Giving your time, ideas and energy may be rewarding for you and the recipient. Volunteer a few hours with a favorite organization or spend some time with a friend or neighbor that may need support. Provide some time for a friend or neighbor who needs an errand run or respite from care giving.

Both holiday stress and depression can be caused by fatigue, unrealistic expectations, commercialized

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versions of the perfect Christmas and disappointment when we fall short of our goals.

Although many people deal with anxiety and the blues during the holiday season, these problems can worsen if left ignored. If you try self-help techniques and feelings of distress continue, consult your health care provider.

Whatever you may do to reduce stress or depression remember that a Happy Holiday is a healthy holiday.

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