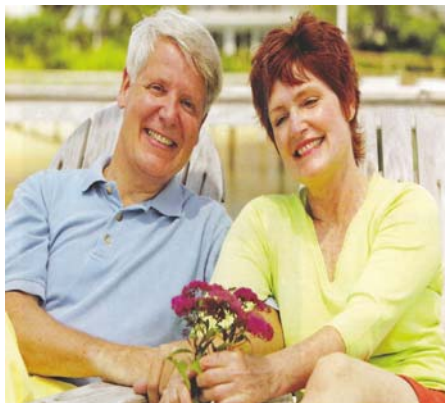


When the Holidays Hurt

For some, this will be the first holiday without a loved one. Donna Daisy, Ph.D. has advice on coping with holiday grief.

A few years ago, I lost my mother in early December. I was devastated. The two of us were very close, and I was struggling to work my way through the normal grief that accompanies losing someone you love. How could I begin to deal with the holiday season which was already in full swing? As I talked with several of my friends about how hard the holiday season was going to be that year, I realized that I was just one of many people who had lost someone dear to them, and were trying to cope in the best way they could. One of my friends, whose husband had died in November, perfectly expressed how I felt when she said, 'I wish I could just pull the covers over my head and stay in bed until the holidays are over.'



For people who have suffered loss, it seems like the whole world is in a festive mood while all they feel is sadness and loneliness. To make matters worse, the feelings of loss and grief are often compounded by the additional stress - physical, emotional, financial that accompanies holiday activities. The result can be devastating if we don't have any strategies for coping with the holiday blues, the grief, and even depression that can seem to take over our lives.

Grief can show up in our lives in many ways. Emotionally, we may become easily agitated, suffer from anxiety, or feel excessive or inappropriate guilt. A decreased interest in activities that once brought us pleasure (including sex) may occur. Our concentration level may decline, or we may experience feelings of hopelessness or worthlessness.

The grieving process can also affect us in physical ways with headaches, fatigue, and trouble sleeping, or sleeping too much, loss of energy; or weight gain or loss.

The good news is that there are several helpful steps someone who's grieving can do to get through the holidays.

The Hospice Foundation of America makes the following suggestions:

- Plan for the approaching holidays. The additional stress may affect you emotionally, cognitively, and physically; this is a normal reaction. Be prepared.

- Rest and get enough sleep.

I've also found it helpful during the holiday season to enjoy "soul-nourishing" conversations. For example, when attending a social gathering, rather than standing around listening to the latest gossip, find one person you really like, sit down and have a heartfelt conversation. You might consider avoiding parties that leave you feeling empty inside. You don't need to defend yourself or explain your decision. Just be gracious and firm. Your "soul-care" is always a valid excuse.

Exercise also helps me. Get out and move your body. Go