Have you got the holiday blues?

It's holiday time again. Yet while everyone else seems to be full of joy and good cheer, many people are experiencing the “blues.” Unfortunately, stress and depression don't take a holiday. In fact, the periods leading up to and during the winter holiday can bring additional stress, anxiety, loneliness and depression.

The increased demands in terms of shopping, preparations and hosting family and friends can seem overwhelming. Your stress reactions may include headaches, excessive drinking, overeating and difficulty sleeping. Additionally, memories of past holiday celebrations, happier times, thoughts of a lost loved one, or the turmoil of families in transition can all turn holiday cheer to sadness.

Tips and Tools You Can Use

To keep your holiday stress in check, try to set realistic expectations. Don't feel obligated to accept every invitation. Do only the things you want to do, and spend time with people whose company you enjoy. Consider the following tips to help you through the season:

If You're Feeling "Blue"

When the holidays start to drag you down, here are some suggestions on how to divert your attention and brighten your spirits.

- Try to let go of the past and embrace life's changes.
- Honour a lost loved one or a changed family structure through a new holiday tradition.
- If you're mourning a lost relationship or feeling alone, celebrate with friends and other singles.
- Focus your energy on something or someone else.
- Try volunteering or get involved in local community celebrations. Helping others through tough times can be rewarding and rejuvenating.
- Don't overeat or drink too much—this is not a helpful (or healthy) coping strategy.

When it's More Than the "Blues"

If your “down” or dark mood persists, it might not be mere holiday “blues,” it could be depression. Some varying forms of such feelings include:

Depression. This is a whole-body disorder that can affect you both physically and emotionally. You may find it difficult to carry on with usual activities, including sleeping, eating or enjoying life. It can last for weeks, months or even years.

Sadness. This is simply part of being human, and is a natural reaction to painful circumstances. Everyone will experience sadness at some point in their life.

Stress. This feeling can come from any situation or thought that makes you feel frustrated, angry, nervous, or even anxious. What is stressful to one person is not necessarily stressful to another.

Anxiety. This is a feeling of apprehension or fear. You may not know the source of this uneasiness, which can add to the distress you feel.

Signs of Depression

Depression can be hard to diagnose. It’s best to leave an official diagnosis up to a medical professional. But if you think you or someone you know may be suffering from depression, keep track of the following signs

and symptoms, and discuss them with your doctor.

Symptoms of depression may include:

- Feelings of extreme sadness or irritability
- Changes in sleeping patterns
- Changes in weight or appetite
- Aches and pains
- Fatigue, lethargy or loss of energy
- Difficulty concentrating
- Loss of pleasure or interest in things previously enjoyed
- Feelings of guilt, helplessness, despair or hopelessness
- Excessive crying
- Thoughts of suicide

If you or a loved one is experiencing a number of these symptoms, it may be time to seek professional assistance. In an emergency, call your local distress centre or crisis line.

While the holidays are supposed to be a happy and cheerful time for all, this is not always the case. It’s often common for people to suffer from depression, sadness, stress or anxiety during the holidays due to the time crunch and increased pressures. If you think that you or someone you know is suffering from one of these elements, consider seeking the advice and treatment of a medial professional.