



## Take steps to chase post-holiday blues

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I get really psyched up for the holidays.

Even shopping in large crowds is fun, and making plans for family gatherings and special events adds to the excitement. Taking a few days off helps too.

All the "feel-good" brain chemicals (norepinephrine, serotonin and dopamine) are working overtime, adding to the euphoric high that many of us experience.

But, then it's all over.

The decorations come down; the weather seems colder; the sun seems always to be tucked away behind a blanket of clouds; we leave for work in the dark and get home after dark; and friends and relatives visiting from out of town have returned home.

No wonder I'm feeling the blahs.

After studying this for a number of years, I've come to realize that a significant number of us experience what experts label as the post holiday blues.

For me, it started in school. In grade school and high school, we had a number of days off throughout the fall for teacher workshops, Thanksgiving and Christmas. In college, we enjoyed a much-needed holiday break. It was a period of time when we didn't seem to have a care in the world other than relaxing, having fun and not looking at any textbook.

But then, the holiday stretch was over and it was time to return to the classroom in which there was no more time off until spring break!

All of this translates to what many of us experience as adults: simply feeling a bit of a letdown as we

attempt to settle in for continued cold weather with no vacation time, no major holidays at least until Memorial Day and what seems like no sun for weeks at a time.

This is a potential recipe for depression.

The psychological dynamics for the post-holiday blues begin with our brain getting keyed up for the coming events only to cause a feeling of letdown once the events are over.

As one author noted, "Hitting January 2 is like going from 60 to zero in one day."

So, what do we do? I like to think of it as rebooting our internal computer system. Here are some tips on powering through the post-holiday blues:

- Use your emotional discomfort as a motivator to conquer the blah feelings.
- Connect with friends.
- Get out to a movie.
- Eat out at least once a week — it doesn't have to be expensive, either.
- Organize family pictures, especially if they are in disarray.
- Try some new recipes.
- Take care of your body. Exercise regularly.
- Get to a book store and buy a book and then read it.
- Rent that movie you've always wanted to see.
- Reorganize personal finances.
- Begin planning for spring and summer. Maybe that old grill needs to be replaced. You can find some pretty good deals this time of year.

- Take some comfort in knowing you're not alone.

If you don't feel better after a period of time, you may need to seek professional help.

Getting past January and February is important, since March winds bring April showers and May flowers.

Before you know it, the sun's out, the days are longer, the weather is warmer and it'll be time to put the lounge chairs out on the patio again. I can't wait!

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