



## Depression shouldn't be on the menu for holiday

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A few years ago, Kim Morehead thought she had her Thanksgiving dinner plans under control.

The turkey would go into the oven at 5 a.m. in a cooking bag, where it would do its thing at 350 degrees for five hours until it was ready to carve and plate.

At midnight, after a long day of readying her home for guests, Morehead assembled her supplies before going to bed. That was when she discovered a snag in her plan — no oven bags.

"I was using cooking bags and a disposable roasting pan even though my mother-in-law had offered to lend me her roasting pan, but then I couldn't find the bags, even though I knew I'd bought them," she said.

Grabbing her car keys and with wet hair, Morehead headed into the night in search of cooking bags.

"This was before we had 24-hour stores, so I had to go from one little shop to another asking for cooking bags. The clerks looked at me like I was crazy, and I guess I was a bit."

After driving around for hours, Morehead returned home at 3 a.m., empty-handed. Running on no sleep and scrambling for a new plan, she decided to roast the turkey sans the bag — only to discover her disposable roasting tin had a hole in it.

Her story is not atypical in the lore of Thanksgiving-day dramas, said Bonnie Rinks, director of Clinical Services and Programs at Southwestern Behavioral Healthcare Inc. The pitfalls, however, can be avoided through communication, organization and self-awareness.

"We put pressure on ourselves to create those perfect moments — like in a Norman Rockwell painting — and this adds stress to our lives," accelerating depression and anxiety, Rinks said.

While stress can be a major contributor

to depression, it isn't the only one. There are things we can do to avoid setting ourselves up for depressive episodes during the holiday.

"We can alleviate depression symptoms by developing healthy coping skills — getting more sleep, eating better nutrition, exercising more and lessening our alcohol consumption," said Pamela Rhodes, a psychotherapist and partner of aha! (Architects of Human Awareness).

Getting people to develop healthy coping skills is a process that we may not achieve in one holiday season. With that in mind, both Rhodes and Rinks want people to remember that while food may seem to be the center of Thanksgiving, it is really a time to feed our souls through fellowship.

"Thanksgiving is supposed to be fun and a chance to connect with the people we love, to be thankful for having them in our lives," Rinks said.

Overloading our plates (figuratively) will lead to feeling disjointed and burdened at a time when we should be enjoying ourselves and others. Being aware of this and knowing how to self-soothe is critical to surviving the holidays, Rhodes said.

While connecting with friends and family is the essence of Thanksgiving, the anticipation of these impending connections can bring on depression and anxiety in adults that trickle down to their children, Rhodes warns.

If parents are anxious about seeing certain family members, their children are likely to pick up on this and become anxious, too, especially if this involves traveling to a new environment.

Communication, therefore, is essential in alleviating a child's anxiety.

"Kids pick up on things, and it transforms their worlds out of balance," Rhodes said.

To help prevent this, parents can show photographs of the people the children will meet or introduce the child to the relative via the phone first. And just because the parents are the ones making the decisions as to what the family will do and where they will go, it's important that plans be explained to the children ahead of time, Rhodes said.

Young couples have to navigate the traditions of their respective families as they begin to create a new life together. To make the terrain less treacherous, they need to communicate and compromise with each other — and their families — as they make their holiday plans, Rinks said.

To avoid a holiday disaster, the recipe is simple: Be realistic about what you can accomplish, discuss with your partner what the family will be doing on Thanksgiving and be aware of how you are feeling and have self-soothing mechanisms in place, Rhodes said.

Morehead's lack of sleep was the driving force behind her unnecessary anxiety. In the end, however, she employed Plan B and borrowed her mother-in-law's roasting pan.

"It was a silly mistake, but it cost me a lot of unnecessary anguish and sleep," said Morehead, adding that her sister-in-law later found the oven bags in the towel drawer.

"In the craziness of preparing for a lot of guest, you've got so many things on your mind you put things away and don't remember."

Thanksgiving can be weighted with expectations for many, but Rhodes wants people to remember that it is just one day.

"After it was all done and over with we laughed about it, and since then we've told the story over and over again," Morehead said, adding that her sister occasionally buys her turkey bags as a joke.