

## DEALING WITH SCROOGE

*By Neeru Bakshi, MD, Overlake Behavioral Health Center*

**H**olidays bring a wide range of emotions. Many people look forward to all of the excitement and activity, while others may feel apprehension and anxiety. I often see an increase in patients seeking mental health support right around the holidays. Though many people feel they are the only ones who don't enjoy the holiday hubbub, year-end blues are quite common and there are many ways to deal with your "inner Scrooge" if you find yourself feeling low.

Many factors contribute to feelings of depression at the end of the year, including the reduced daylight and time spent outdoors, more time with family that can bring up past family stresses or grievances, the surge of holiday activities, fatigue

**HELPFUL WEB SITES**  
[www.overlakehospital.org/staywell](http://www.overlakehospital.org/staywell)  
[www.nami.org](http://www.nami.org) (National Alliance of Mental Illness)

from trying to do too much, as well as financial concerns.

Unrealistic expectations are one of the biggest reasons for holiday blues. Many people have a favorite memory or idealized picture of what the holiday should be like. Attempting to recreate the perfect holiday instead of living in the moment can easily result in disappointment. Instead, try to start the season with a plan that's reasonable so you don't get overtired, stressed and blue. As you make your plan, consider these tips:

- Give yourself a break. Instead of striving for perfection, strive to enjoy whatever activities you do participate in. The holiday season doesn't have to be perfect to be fun and memorable.
- Set boundaries. Don't let other people's expectations dictate your feelings or actions. Decide what is most important to you and follow your own holiday plan to celebrate (or not).
- Get outside when you can. It helps to get enough light in winter, even sitting by a window can help you get the light you need to stay in a positive frame of mind.
- Eat a lot of green, leafy vegetables. These foods are full of vitamin D, which has a direct impact on stabilizing your mood.
- Consider adding a vitamin D supplement. A vitamin D deficiency can often contribute to depression. The recommended daily dosage is 1,000 International Units. Talk with your doctor to see if you would benefit by adding a vitamin D supplement.
- Keep moving. Exercise helps boost endorphins that elevate your mood, reduce stress and improve sleep.
- Don't hibernate. Socializing—balanced with some personal

down-time—provides important emotional support and helps us let go of negativity. When people isolate themselves completely, they tend to focus on problems.

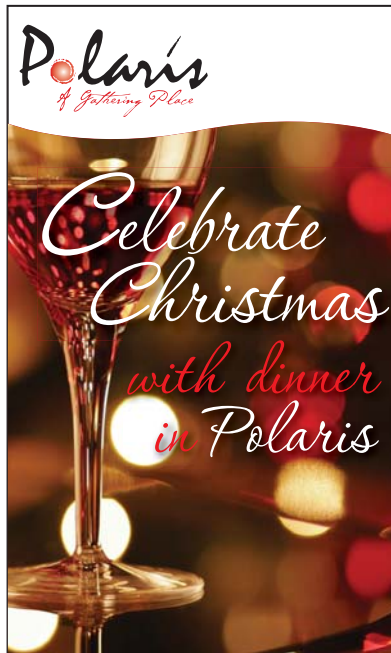
Holiday tension is different from clinically diagnosed depression, but it can lead to something more serious. The National Institute of Mental Health reports that one in four adults—approximately 57.7 million Americans—experience a mental health disorder in a given year. Unfortunately, many people with clinical depression don't seek help, even though depression is a treatable condition.

The symptoms of a major depressive disorder represent a significant change in a person's ability to function. The symptoms of depression include:

- Persistently sad or irritable mood
- Pronounced changes in sleep, appetite and energy
- Difficulty thinking, concentrating and remembering
- Physical slowing or agitation
- Lack of interest in or pleasure from activities that were once enjoyed
- Feelings of guilt, worthlessness, hopelessness and emptiness
- Recurrent thoughts of death or suicide
- Persistent physical symptoms that do not respond to treatment, such as headaches, digestive disorders and chronic pain

When several of these symptoms of depressive illness occur at the same time, last longer than two weeks, and interfere with ordinary activities, professional treatment is needed.

If you can't seem to shake the holiday blues or find yourself feeling down for a sustained period of time, get some help. Contact your primary-care physician to talk about it. Your doctor may refer you to a mental health specialist. There are many different treatment options that can make a big difference in getting back to a positive outlook on life.



**CHOICE OF THE REGULAR OR CHEF'S TASTING MENU.**

**DEC. 24 & DEC. 25**

**5:30-9:30 P.M.**

Reservations are required.  
Please call 637-3410.