

Addiction and The Holiday Season

By Jim Rachels



It has been known for a long time that for some reason around the holiday season every year many people suffer from a depression specifically brought upon by the holidays. Nobody can say exactly why this happens, but it does.

Personally, I do get a little blue from the holidays. Probably all the other stuff that people all feel around the holidays. For the most part year round I'm okay with being single. I have plenty on my plate to keep myself busy and most of all keep myself sober. Just like other people I cannot pinpoint why exactly this happens to me. I wish I knew but all I can do is try to manage the best I can until the holidays are over.

First I want to ask the question why is there this holiday depression? What causes it? And is there a way to manage this better?

When surveyed one of the biggest stressors during the holiday season was financially based. During the holidays people are somewhat expected to give gifts to others. Most people don't take into consideration that we might not have the money to do this. So that makes this financial stressor now related to depression as many feel upset over the fact they don't have the money to do what they want.

I know I felt like shit every holiday. Especially Christmas Day as that's when we mostly exchange gifts one on one. I remember my brother and sisters were able to afford gifts to give my Mom. I wasn't able to and I felt like such a loser, and such a failure I can't even describe it. I couldn't even afford flowers to give her. I was always living paycheck to paycheck and also borrowing money from my mom. But of course, I always had the money for alcohol and drugs. Knowing that I spent my money on that and not gifts sunk me even further into a depression. Even as I'm writing this now I feel like a loser. It just felt like one thing after the other bringing me down further and really sinking me into a depression.

Last year was a bit different as we didn't get together due to COVID. At the time I wasn't talking to most of my family and it was a really rough time. I'm a single guy who has no roommate. So it was lonely, so I still sunk into a depression. There is just something about being alone on the holidays when for literally you're entire life you had the same routine. Christmas Eve and my Aunt Mary's and then Christmas day at my Mom's. I also had some arguments with family members and wasn't really talking to anybody in my family. Another thing for me is my birthday is December 19th so I have to deal with the feelings that come along with that as well.

Another thing to consider is if you are a recovering alcoholic like myself are there going to be drinks served at whatever event you're invited to. You have to sit there and debate if your strong enough to see your family or not. This is a battle of great difficulty. Some of us new to sobriety

might need the support of our family around the holiday season only to be unable to see them because there will be drinks there. And it could be dangerous to be all alone for a recovering addict during the holiday season.

Let's look at some statistics relevant to this. "According to the CDC, the most dangerous times of the year for drug-and-alcohol-related deaths are December, January, and March. Nearly 91,000 deaths have been reported for the month of December since 1999." That is a staggering amount if you ask me. And it shows that holiday depression lasts quite a few months. It's not just one month and it's over. Something else to think about is "while holiday drinking may be brought on by celebration, our survey data also indicates that holiday stressors may play a role in over-consumption and the resulting spike in drug and alcohol-related deaths." This is from drugabuse.gov.

For me, it's not so much the season but the events I attend during the season. The major ones are Christmas Eve and Christmas Day. But there is a sadness leading up to these events that I feel. I know that everyone is going to be exchanging gifts and I have major anxiety as I know I have no money leading up to Christmas. It was a really sad state of affairs for me.

The thing about it is I'm also bipolar. This has a lot to do with the way I'm feeling at any given moment. But add all these holiday stressors on top of the normal everyday stressors and you've got a deep depression coming on. I remember last year my Mom was able to stop by really quick and say hello for five minutes and then drop off some food. For some reason just eating the holiday food she gave me also sent me into a depression. I'm not sure if it is just a mental reminder of what I missed or what but that food got me depressed. Or maybe a depression came on that same day from just seeing my mom. But it was probably one of those.

One of our members suggested we discuss way to handle and prep before heading off to a holiday party where there will be drinks around. Here is a list of some things you can do to help yourself.

1. Take your own care so you can leave when you want.
2. Or take Uber money with you.
3. Agree to visit for just a short period of time so you're not there too long surrounded by alcohol and temptation.
4. Make sure you have a list of phone numbers of sober people should you have a temptation to drink or use.

These are just a few simple things you can do to help yourself during the holiday season and the gatherings that come along with it. Now another huge reason for depression is a lot of us addicts are alone on the holidays. Some of us have even lost our families due to addiction. For

myself being alone during a depression and being inside my own head is no good. I say it just like this – When I am alone I am alone with my own worst enemy. Sometimes my bipolar just gets me real down and then with my ADHD I just focus on the bad stuff and bring myself further and further into a deep depression.

So how do we overcome and get through these depressions that we go through? Some of us stop taking care of ourselves completely. I always try to be honest which I'm going to do here as what I'm about to say is a little embarrassing. Last year I didn't shower for approximately ten days. In fact the only reason I eventually showered was that I was able to literally smell myself. The clothes I was wearing and even the blanket on the couch stunk. During this time I also gained about twenty pounds as I was eating nothing but junk. We're talking a bag of chips followed by two containers of ice cream with lots of chocolate syrup. For this depression, I just waited it out. It eventually subsided. But it took a while for it to totally go away. I'd say about a month or two. I just didn't feel completely alright for a while.

This year I'm going to try to be a little bit more prepared. I'm really going to take some time to self-reflect and maybe get some meditation in about the holiday season. To me self-reflection and meditation are extremely important tools in the fight against depression and addiction. I highly recommend to anyone that might be reading to at least give this a try. Go to YouTube and just type in "guided meditation" and that should get you a bunch of videos to listen to while you meditate.

We all are responsible for ourselves and our own triggers. We have to own that. No one else can. So we have to be extra careful and take the necessary precautions during the holiday season. Maybe try to find access to a therapist to speak with. Maybe a trusted friend can lend an open ear to you. Maybe you have someone from your support group you can turn to for some judgment-free guidance. These are just a few of the tools you can use to help yourself during the holidays.

As I write this I know that I've got an uphill battle coming my way as I could already feel it inside of me just brewing. One of the things I've come to lean on is this group and I intend on doing just that. Addicts Anonymous has grown and I've met some really great people along the way and I know that I can rely on them in times of need.

In the end we need to all just be as prepared as possible for the holidays if you tend to get down around that time. Equip yourself with as many tools as possible whether that's therapy, medication or meditation just be ready with tools in the toolbelt. I hope you got something from this article and I hope everyone gets through the holiday season ok and has a great time!