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# HealthSTAT focus

Health & Wellness Information  
to Improve your Condition

## Keep the Holidays Happy, the Kids Safe

The holiday season is the time of year families gather and make happy memories. It is also the time when most of the toys and games are purchased for children. While kids look forward to holiday presents all year long, these toys can be a danger. Accidental injury is a leading killer of children age 14 and under worldwide, and many of these accidents involve toys. Most of these accidental injuries can be prevented by taking simple safety measures. Here are some tips from the National Safe Kids Campaign for buying safe toys for children:

- ❖ **When selecting toys, consider the child's age, interests and skill level.** Look for quality design and construction, and follow age and safety recommendations on labels.
- ❖ **Consider purchasing a small parts tester** to determine whether small toys may present a choking hazard to children under age 3. Small parts testers can be purchased at toy or baby specialty stores.
- ❖ **Toys are frequently recalled for safety reasons.** Check the National Safe Kids Campaign website [www.safekids.org](http://www.safekids.org) for updates and information on recent toy recalls.
- ❖ **Use mylar balloons instead of latex** to eliminate the risk of choking or latex allergy reaction.
- ❖ **Avoid toys with sharp points or edges, toys that produce loud noises, and projectiles** (such as darts).
- ❖ **Avoid toys with strings, straps or cords longer than 7 inches** that may pose a risk for strangulation for young children.
- ❖ **Avoid electrical toys with heating elements** for children under age 8.
- ❖ **Avoid cap guns that use caps that can be ignited by the slightest friction** and can cause serious burns.

Many eye injuries occur from toys, and are common around holiday time. There are three important ways you can protect your child's eyes from injuries while playing with toys:

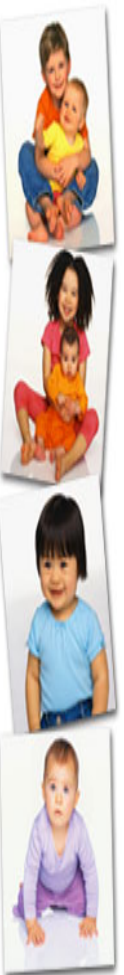
1. **Only buy toys meant for their age.**
2. **Show them how to use their toys safely**
3. **Keep an eye on them when they play.**

### Other Tips to Keep Children Safe From Toy-Related Injuries

Inspect toys regularly for damage and potential hazards such as sharp edges. Make any necessary repairs immediately, or discard damaged toys out of children's reach. Supervise your children to keep them safe from toy-related injuries. Get involved and actively play with your children rather than watching from a distance. Make sure toys are used in a safe environment. Teach children to put toys away safely after playing.

**Keep your holiday memories happy and keep the little ones safe during holiday time!**

Source: National Safe Kids Campaign, [www.safekids.org](http://www.safekids.org).



*HealthSTAT Extends Best Wishes for the  
Happiest of Holidays and a Healthy New Year!*

# Holiday Stress & Depression

The holiday season is a time full of cheer, parties, and family gatherings. However, for many people, it is a time of self-evaluation, loneliness, reflection on past failures, and anxiety about an uncertain future.

## What Causes Holiday Depression?

Many factors can cause the “**holiday blues**”: **stress, fatigue, unrealistic expectations, over-commercialization, financial constraints, and the inability to be with one’s family and friends.** The demands of shopping, parties, family reunions, and house guests also contribute to feelings of tension. People who do not become depressed may develop other stress responses, such as: headaches, excessive drinking, over-eating, and difficulty sleeping. Even more people experience post-holiday let down after the beginning of the New Year. This can result from disappointments during the preceding months compounded with the excess fatigue and stress.

**Coping with Stress and Depression During the Holidays** – to deal with the “**holiday blues**”, follow these tips.

- **Keep expectations for the holiday season manageable.**

Try to set realistic goals for yourself. Pace yourself. Organize your time. Make a list and prioritize the important activities. Be realistic about what you can and cannot do. Do not put entire focus on just one day (i.e., Thanksgiving Day); remember it is a season of holiday sentiment. Activities can be spread out (time-wise) to lessen stress and increase enjoyment.

- **Remember the holiday season does not banish reasons for feeling sad or lonely.**

There is room for these feelings to be present, even if the person chooses not to express them.

- **Leave “yesteryear” in the past and look toward the future.**

Life brings changes. Each season is different and can be enjoyed in its own way. Don’t set yourself up in comparing today with the “good ole days.”

- **Do something for someone else.**

Try volunteering some time to help others.

- **Enjoy activities that are free.**

Driving around to look at holiday decorations, going window shopping without buying or making a snowperson with children can be great fun during holiday time.

- **Be aware that excessive drinking will only increase your feelings of depression.**

- **Try something new.**

Celebrate the holidays in a new way.

- **Spend time with supportive and caring people.**

Reach out and make new friends or contact someone you have not heard from for awhile.

- **Save time for yourself!**

Recharge your batteries! Let others share responsibility for holiday activities.

*Continued on Page 3*



## Holiday Stress & Depression (continued from previous page)

### Can Environment Be a Factor?

Recent studies show that some people suffer from seasonal affective disorder (SAD) which results from fewer hours of sunlight as the days grow shorter during the winter months. Phototherapy, a treatment involving a few hours of exposure to intense light, is effective in relieving depressive symptoms in patients with SAD.

Other studies on the benefits of phototherapy found that exposure to early morning sunlight was effective in relieving seasonal depression. Recent findings, however, suggest that patients respond equally well to phototherapy whether it is scheduled in the morning or early afternoon. This has practical applications for antidepressant treatment since it allows the use of phototherapy in the workplace as well as the home.

Try to enjoy the holidays by balancing your activities so that you don't get over-stressed, worn out and depressed. Keep an eye out for symptoms of stress and **holiday blues** in your friends and family. Share these coping tips and be understanding of their feelings.

Source: [www.nmha.org](http://www.nmha.org)



focus on Men's Health

focus on Women's Health



## STEALTH HEALTH:

How much do you know about what makes up a healthy lifestyle for men or for women?

Here's a pop quiz.

1. How do you define working out?

- Going to the gym.
- Turning the jump-rope for the neighbor's kid.
- Playing Frisbee with your dog.

2. How do you define good nutrition?

- Eating a vegetable at every meal.
- Eating two vegetables at every meal.
- Drinking a fruit smoothie for breakfast.

3. Which of these is a healthy activity?

- Push-ups, sit-ups, or running the track.
- Walking the dog after dinner.
- Spending Saturday afternoon snoozing on the sofa.

**Believe it or not, the correct answer to every question is A,B, and C. Even that Saturday afternoon snooze! According to the growing "Stealth Health" movement, sneaking healthy habits into our daily living is easier than we think.**

from [www.webmd.com](http://www.webmd.com)

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## FLU SHOT REMINDER

***It is not too late to get your flu shot and protect yourself from the flu viruses which cause much sickness this time of year.***

***People who should get vaccinated each year. Include those at high risk for complications from the flu, including:***

- Children aged 6–59 months;
- Pregnant women;
- People 50 years of age and older;
- People of any age with certain chronic medical conditions;
- People who live in nursing homes and other long term care facilities;
- People who live with or care for those at high risk for complications from flu; and
- Healthcare Workers.

## Stealth Health Pop Quiz (continued from Page 3)

"You can infuse your life with the power of prevention incrementally and fairly painlessly, and yes, doing *something*, no matter how small, is infinitely better for you than doing nothing," says David Katz, MD, MPH, director of Yale University's Prevention Research Center and of the Yale Preventive Medicine Center. Katz is also co-author of the book *Stealth Health: How to Sneak Age-Defying, Disease-Fighting Habits into Your Life without Really Trying*.

From your morning shower to the evening news, from your work commute to your household chores, Katz says, there are at least 2,400 ways to sneak healthy activities into daily living. "If you let yourself make small changes, they will add up to meaningful changes in the quality of your diet, your physical activity pattern, your capacity to deal with stress, and in your sleep quality -- and those four things comprise an enormously powerful health promotion that can change your life," says Katz.

And yes, he says, a nap on the couch can be a health-giving opportunity -- particularly if you aren't getting enough sleep at night.

Nutritionist and diabetes educator Fran Grossman, RD, CDE, agrees. "You don't have to belong to a gym or live on wheat grass just to be healthy," says Grossman, a nutrition counselor at the Mt. Sinai School of Medicine in New York. "There are dozens of small things you can do every day that make a difference, and you don't always have to do a lot to gain a lot."

### Try the Stealth Health Approach

Tempted to give "Stealth Health" a try? Katz recommends picking any three of the following changes and incorporating them into your life for four days. When you feel comfortable with those changes, pick three others. Once you've incorporate all twelve changes, you should start to feel a difference within a couple of weeks, he says.

**This newsletter is a monthly publication of HealthSTAT, Inc., for its clients and their employees. It is for informational purposes only, and is not intended to replace medical advice.**

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#### **To Improve Nutrition:**

**Buy whole foods** -- whether canned, frozen, or fresh from the farm -- and use them in place of processed foods whenever possible. **Reject foods and drinks made with corn syrup**, a calorie-dense, nutritionally empty sweetener that many believe is worse for the body than sugar, says Katz. **Start each dinner with a mixed green salad**. Not only will it help reduce your appetite for more caloric foods, but it also will automatically add veggies to your meal.

#### **To Improve Physical Fitness:**

**Do a squat every time you pick something up**. Instead of bending over in the usual way, which stresses the lower back, bend your knees and squat. This forces you to use your leg muscles and will build strength. **Every time you stop at a traffic light, tighten your thighs and butt muscles and release as many times as you can**. (Don't worry, no one will see it!) This will firm leg and buttock muscles, improve blood flow -- and keep you mildly amused! **Whenever you're standing in a line, lift one foot a half-inch off the ground**. The extra stress on your opposite foot, ankle, calf and thigh, plus your buttocks, will help firm and tone muscles. Switch feet every few minutes.

#### **To Improve Stress Control:**

**Give your partner a hug every day before work**. Studies show this simple act can help you remain calm when chaos ensues during your day, Katz says. **Have a good cry**. It can boost your immune system, reduce levels of stress hormones, eliminate depression, and help you think more clearly. **Twice a day, breathe deeply for three to five minutes**.

#### **To Improve Sleep:**

**Sprinkle just-washed sheets and pillowcases with lavender water**. The scent has been shown in studies to promote relaxation, which can lead to better sleep. **Buy a new pillow**. Katz says that studies show that pillows with an indent in the center can enhance sleep quality and reduce neck pain. Also, try a "cool" pillow -- one containing either all-natural fibers or a combination of sodium sulfate and ceramic fibers that help keep your head cool. **Eat a handful of walnuts before bed**. You'll be giving yourself a boost of fiber and essential fatty acids along with the amino acid tryptophan -- a natural sleep-inducer.

SOURCES: *Archives of Internal Medicine*. 2004; vol 164: pp 31-39. *Medicine & Science in Sports & Exercise*, September 2002. David Katz, MD, MPH, director, Prevention Research Center, Yale University; co-author, *Stealth Health: How to Sneak Age-Defying, Disease-Fighting Habits into Your Life without Really Trying*. Fran Grossman, MS, RD, CDE, nutrition counselor, Mt. Sinai School of Medicine, New York. Helene Glassberg, MD, director, Preventive Cardiology and Lipid Center, Temple University School of Medicine, Philadelphia. Marc Siegel, MD, clinical associate professor, New York University School of Medicine; author, *False Alarm, The Truth about the Epidemic of Fear*.