



spotlight on health

Simple Ways To Beat The Seasonal Blues

(NAPSA)—The holidays offer the promise of loving family gatherings, terrific food, and generous good feelings. But for many, this vision is sheer fantasy. With that realization comes profound sadness. The result is that mental health professionals receive a greatly increased volume of calls from now until after Valentine's Day. Experts call this the "holiday blues."

The cause of holiday distress is varied. Some people expect to relive the holidays of their childhood or to have better holidays than past ones. Others have lost a loved one. Based on our national crisis and the fact that armed service personnel are serving overseas in greater numbers than in the past, the "blues" are affecting record numbers this year, even those who ordinarily could cope with family separations and holiday hassles.

Mental health professionals offer some tips, especially for those who are alone, and urge planning something well in advance of the holiday.

Preplanning, they say, helps you focus on alternatives that are positive and reinforcing.

- Help others. Community, religious, and social service organizations are eager for volunteers to serve holiday meals or to deliver food to shut-ins.

- Don't sit home alone. More people than you think are also alone, so plan a holiday dinner for them. Have everyone contribute a side dish, dessert or beverages to ease the burden on your time and budget. The key is to let it be known that you are cooking.

- Consider taking St. John's wort, a well-known herbal supplement for mood enhancement,

available in drug and nutrition stores. Start taking it immediately, so you can benefit from the gentle mood changes it produces by the time the holidays arrive.

- Create new holiday traditions with a friend or family member. Attend worship services, make new holiday dishes, or participate in community activities.

- Be good to yourself. Buy something special you've wanted.

- Focus on the positive in your life. Acknowledge what's good. Let go of the bad.

Not sure if you have the holiday blues or something more serious?

Signs of more serious mood disorders include dramatic changes in eating habits, sleep patterns, and general behavior (more or less animated than normal); low energy levels, feeling sad or irritated, experiencing a loss of pleasure and interest in favorite activities, having difficulty thinking or concentrating, and in very extreme cases, thoughts of suicide.

Experts suggest that it's best to see a physician or clinical psychologist for evaluation, if you have these symptoms.

However, if you are simply "blue" and need a mood enhancer, you can look for new St. John's wort ZE117, a once-a-day low-dose formulation of St. John's wort.

Check with your physician before taking any herbal supplement, especially if you are pregnant, nursing, or on medication for any reason.

