

December 11, 2015



Friday Focus

Tis' the Season... but for many it's for stress and depression.

Santa, Rudolph, best prices of the year, and increased suicide rates are all ideas we associate with the holiday season. However, they all have one other thing in common; they are all fiction. Fact is, according to multiple studies including those published by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC, 2013) and in *Psychology Today* (Burton, 2012), the rate for suicide actually decline during the days between Thanksgiving and Christmas. Instead sociological studies suggest that the proximity of friends and relatives may actually be somewhat protective for people suffering from suicidal ideations. Communities come together and we have a sense of cohesion with one another. Still, although we love to sing about how, "It's the most wonderful time of the year...", it is not for everyone.

Fact is, although programs such as "A Christmas Carol," and "A Christmas Story," and "A Miracle on 34th Street" fill our TVs with images of love, for many, the holidays simply aren't so cheerful. We engage in poor eating and drinking habits. We have end of the year deadlines. We stress over how we can afford the latest and greatest items. Then comes the inevitable family dysfunction. At the same time, the constant reminders of others' happiness and love can serve as a painful reminder of loss and loneliness.

In response, psychiatrists, psychologists, and sociologists have come up with a list of risk factors for holiday depression and best practices for how to avoid them. Below is a list of the 5 most common;

<i>Stressor</i>	<i>Solution</i>
<i>Unrealistic Expectations – The perfect 'White Christmas.'</i>	Be Realistic. We all have that dysfunctional family member. Your house does not need to be seen from the space station. Not everyone can cook a gourmet meal and you certainly cannot do it in 30 min and look like it does on TV.
<i>Finances</i>	Stick to a budget
<i>Trying to do too much</i>	Plan ahead and don't be afraid to say "no."
<i>Unhealthy eating and drinking</i>	Remember to take some time for yourself.
<i>Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD)</i>	Don't abandon you healthy habits.
	Remember, all things in moderation
	Seek professional help if you need it.

* More about this disorder to come next week.

Still there is one thing we can all do to help our members this holiday season; Smile. While scientists disagree on the exact number of muscles needed to smile, there is one thing they agree upon. Smiling transmits a universally accepted set of information. It shows warmth, friendliness, and a willingness to help. Studies have shown that a smiling experimenter elicited a smile from participants. More importantly, smiling affects mental and physical wellbeing. Your smile alone may be all it takes to help a patient or co-worker cope with the "holiday blues."

As always, we appreciate your ideas and feedback. Thank you for the quality work you do. All Friday Focuses are available on the SWHP site: <https://swhp.org/about-us/news/newsletters/provider-friday-focus>.

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References

Burton, N. (2012, December 23). Is Suicide More Common At Christmas Time? | *Psychology Today*. Retrieved from <https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/hide-and-peek/201212/is-suicide-more-common-christmas-time>

CDC. (2013, December 31). Holiday Suicides: Fact or Myth|Suicide|Violence Prevention|Injury Center|CDC. Retrieved from <http://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/suicide/holiday.html>