

# TO YOUR HEALTH

Carleton-Willard Village Out-Patient Clinic - 100 Old Billerica Road, Bedford MA 01730

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## HAPPY HOLIDAYS?

by Barbara Chenoweth, NP

Sometimes the holidays are not so happy. There can be seasons in one's life that cause the holidays not to hold the same joy and pleasure as they may have at other holiday times. Maybe it's the first holiday season without a spouse or a close friend or family member. Or maybe one's health has changed so that it's not possible to attend the events that were so important in celebrating the season. Or perhaps one is distracted by worries about family members, the economy or their own health problems.

If this is one of those difficult holiday times, what is the best way to survive a season that seems to expect good cheer and an upbeat mood? Or if a friend is struggling to get through the season, how can friends and family offer support and caring? How does one still enjoy the season when someone close does not want to be part of their traditional festivities?

While making the best of a difficult situation is always a challenge, letting go of unrealistic expectations may be a way to start. The holiday season comes with all kinds of expectations, some of which are impossible to meet. These expectations can be overwhelming and self-defeating. Honestly establishing realistic goals can help to alleviate the overwhelming feelings. Few people really have to do *everything* that's expected. Usually the pressures come more from our internal expectations rather than from those of our families or friends. Consider the following sanity measures:

- Set realistic holiday goals

- Don't try to do everything that you've done before
- Let go of the past
- Try something new: celebrate in a different way
- Pace your activities
- Don't be afraid to say "no"
- Spend some time alone
- Be honest about what you want to do
- Do something for someone else
- Get plenty of rest
- Don't over-indulge in alcohol
- Get help...don't tough it out alone

As written in *Beating the Holiday Blues*, (University of Maryland Medical Center, 2008), getting help from other people is an important strategy for coping with the holidays. This could mean seeking out the comfort of a close friend. Or help could come from the support of a counselor who is trained in talking therapy. Sometimes the holidays highlight an underlying feeling of depression that can be helped with professional treatment.

Feelings of sadness or being down most days of the week can signal depression. It is often accompanied by:

- Low self-esteem
- Feelings of hopelessness
- Difficulty sleeping or sleeping too much
- Overeating or lack of appetite
- Difficulty concentrating or making decisions

("Dysthymia: Don't Dismiss Feelings of Sadness," *Health After 50*, Johns Hopkins, November 2011).

It is important to get help for depression because, like any health condition, it can be treated. Talking therapy, exercise and

*(Happy Holidays? Cont.)* antidepressant medicines have been shown to be effective in treating depression. Nowadays, there is less stigma in acknowledging depression and getting treatment. Talking with a health care provider can often help to distinguish depression from unhappiness.

However, for most people being down for moments during the holidays or even after the holidays, are natural in this season of high expectations. Modifying one's expectations and plans can go a long way towards reducing the stress and distress. Finding ways to appreciate and enjoy the meaningful moments can enrich and invigorate our lives.

*With warm wishes for a peaceful holiday season from the Clinic Staff!*

### Letter to a Friend

I am your friend  
and my love for you goes deep.  
There is nothing I can give you  
which you have not got:  
but there is much, very much  
that while I cannot give it,  
you can take.

No heaven can come to us  
unless our hearts find rest  
in today. Take heaven!  
No peace lies in the future  
which is not hidden  
in this present little instant.  
Take peace!

The gloom of the world is but a shadow.  
Behind it, yet within reach, is joy.  
There is radiance and glory  
in the darkness, could we but see,  
and to see we have only to look.  
I beseech you to look!

Life is so generous a giver,  
but we, judging its gifts by  
the covering, cast them away  
as ugly, or heavy or hard.  
Remove the covering and  
you will find beneath it  
a living splendor,  
woven of love, with wisdom, with power

Welcome it, grasp it,  
touch the angel's hand  
that brings it to you.  
Everything we call a trial,  
a sorrow, or a duty, believe me,  
that angel's hand is there,  
the gift is there, and the wonder  
of an overshadowing presence.  
Our joys, too, be not  
content with them as joys.  
They, too, conceal diviner gifts.

Life is so full of meaning and purpose,  
so full of beauty,  
beneath its covering—  
that you will find earth  
but cloaks your heaven.

Courage, then, to claim it, that is all.  
But courage you have,  
and the knowledge that  
we are all pilgrims together,  
wending through unknown country,  
home.

And so, at this time, I greet you,  
not quite as the world sends greetings,  
but with profound esteem  
and with the prayer that for you  
now and forever, the day breaks,  
and the shadows flee away.

Letter written by Fra Giovanni (1513)

- SPECIAL SERIES -

Coping With the Holidays After a Loss - Wednesday December 7, 2011  
10:30am - 11:30am in the Auditorium