

PRACTICALLY DYING

How do you cope after the holidays?

When the din and press of the holidays have died down, sometimes it's wonderful to just collapse on the couch and have the house to yourself again. But some people also experience a letdown as the built-in opportunities to socialize and the reasons for making connections have stopped. Visiting family has gone home, the decorations have been put away, and the reality of a new loss may have had time to settle in. Having time alone to reflect and review about what felt good, and what didn't – can bring surprising things to the fore. Here are some things to be aware of that might help you manage your time and energy better if you are challenged.

- **The 'holiday hangover' can be especially challenging** for those who are facing the dark, cold, quiet months coming up without support or resources. Even people who are not intensely affected by SAD (Seasonal Affective Disorder) can be slightly irritable, tired or off-kilter from the prolonged lack of sunlight. Get outside during the day when the sun is out, even if it is just for a short walk. Mild exercise and sunlight help replenish your body and spirit.
- **Each December, the media presents a compilation of the top stories** of the year. They most often report on scandals, military and political inflammations, natural and man-made disasters, and significant social losses. For many people, these stories activate feelings of helplessness, anger and sadness, whether we are conscious of them or not. Be aware of how you respond personally to the potential of being overwhelmed by bad news.
- **Take time to contact friends and family.** Send cards or emails to people you saw during the holidays, or didn't get to see during the holidays. Take time to renew the connections that you have with others throughout the year.
- **Make efforts to connect with people you enjoy,** who can understand your experience. If you reconnected with someone over the holidays that you enjoyed, let them know that you would like to continue having contact with them. Making lunch or coffee plans once or twice a month can keep you connected to people without major commitments.
- **New Year's Resolutions, according to research, fail more often** than they succeed. If you choose this arbitrary day to set new goals, try to structure them as positive rather than punitive (you may want to lose weight, but is it primarily because you are flawed?) Set only one or two and revisit them again in three months to re-evaluate your goals. Don't wait a whole year. You are

never the same person that you were three months ago. Be concrete and reasonable about how you can stay motivated. If it is hard for you to imagine a positive immediate future, this is one place you can avoid setting yourself up to feel bad.

- **Try to establish or re-establish** a balanced health regimen. Whenever possible, allow yourself time to rest and rejuvenate. The holidays are days of extremes: it's easy to overeat, drink more, eat the wrong foods, change your sleep patterns, or overextend in a number of ways. Any of those can affect your health and your outlook. This commitment is more manageable than a year-long resolution, and it can give you a sense of accomplishment.
- **When the distractions that were so readily available** the last several months are not buffering you, you may feel emotions that you have been able to avoid. Move toward those discomforts in ways that are appropriate to their causes. If you have biochemical imbalances, talk to the right kind of medical practitioner to see what medications or life practices can help. If you are dealing with grief, seek out friends, counseling or group support. If you are lonely, weigh how much energy you have to reach out for support or community, but do try. These heightened situations present opportunities for clarity coupled with motivation to move toward selfcompassion and self-care.
- **Do kindnesses for others – whether it is in thought**, word or deed. In sending goodness to other people, we remember that we have important and worthwhile gifts to bring to the world.

The holidays may have brought up feelings that you thought you were past or ones you didn't know you had. They may have magnified difficult realities. While it may be hard to sit still with the silence and feel the discomfort, it is often in this very silence and stillness that we can rediscover our strengths.