

Dealing With Those January Blues

As hectic and stressful as the holiday season is for many people, it's the weeks that follow that can become the hardest to handle. We like to think of the winter holidays as a time of fun and family, rest and renewal. The truth is that far too often this can be a time full of stress and strife, turmoil and tension. Post-holiday letdown can look, feel, and act like depression, anxiety, substance abuse, anger, physical illness, grief, sleep disturbance, difficulty concentrating, and being "on edge". The good news is that this "letdown" usually only lasts a few weeks. If you find it lasting longer, you



should see a professional. Common causes of this post-holiday letdown include:

1. Strained Family & Friend Relationships – while we like to think the holidays will be a time like those happy times we remember as kids, too often they are simply reminders that the difficult relationships and tensions don't go away just because we have a holiday.

2. Unmet Expectations – we like to imagine that this holiday season will make all of our problems disappear. The reality is that real life doesn't go away during the holidays.

3. Financial Realities – the holidays are a time of gift-giving, extravagant dining, special occasions and events. The pressure is on. That pressure inevitably catches up with us... and our bank account... and usually in January!

4. Fatigue – the pace of life during the holidays can be mind-boggling. We sleep less, we do more, our routines explode. This takes a toll on our bodies and emotions.

5. Reminders of Loved Ones who have Passed Away – while these memorials can be healthy, they too can be unhealthy as

unresolved grief can bring about family tensions, depression and guilt.

6. Alcohol/Drug Consumption – the holidays can be a time to "let loose" and engage in "excess". Far too often this involves alcohol or drugs. Substance abuse can lead to so many other problems. Embarrassments, arguments, unresolved issues resurface between families/friends, and saying things one later regrets all

contribute to tarnishing what is "supposed to be" a fun and happy holiday time.

7. Return to Everyday Life and Related Work Stress – don't underestimate the power of the stress of everyday life. As our lives return to their normal state after the holidays, that stress can return with a vengeance.

Fear not. Post-Holiday Letdown is generally a temporary condition. Here are some of the suggestions for turning that "letdown" into "uplift".

1. Engage in those New Year Goals – often these goals include eating better, exercising more, reading more, etc. All of these activities have incredible benefits for your health and well being.

2. Enroll in Something New or Enlist in Volunteer Activity – taking a class, learning something new, or volunteering for a cause important to you are actually quite easy.

3. Exercise, exercise, exercise – it's good for the heart...and soul.

4. Spend Time with People You Actually Enjoy – make a concerted effort to nurture those relationships that are truly "feel good" relationships.

5. Get the Help You May Need – how long have you been saying,

"I'm tired of feeling this way or acting this way"? Seeing a professional could be the first step to a whole new you.

Remember that you are not alone – these feelings affect many of us. They can be normal, and can be dealt with in healthy ways, so that YOU can enjoy a very happy 2008!

This article is one of a series by the Strathcona County Community Drug and Alcohol Strategy Committee addressing information about drug and alcohol issues.

For a complete listing of resources available, pick up the Drug/Alcohol Resource Directory at the Strathcona County Health Centre located at 2 Brower Drive or at Strathcona County Family and Community Services located at 2755 Broadmoor Boulevard (2nd Floor) in Sherwood Park. Residents with questions about the strategy can call Strathcona County Family and Community Services at 464-4044.

