

6 Tips to Manage Loneliness Over the Holidays

The holidays are coming soon and many are looking forward to spending extra time with friends, family and coworkers. For others, however, the holiday season can often trigger feelings of loneliness. Whether it's grieving the loss of a loved one, overcoming a breakup, coping with financial stress, or just feeling disconnected, the "[holiday blues](#)" are so common they have their own name. But according to the American Psychological Association, chronic feelings of loneliness can be a cause for concern. Loneliness can have a devastating impact on one's long-term [psychological and physical health](#) as well as predispose individuals to [depression, an increased risk of Alzheimer's disease, suppress immune function, stress the cardiovascular system and even affect longevity](#). Therefore, it is important to practice self-care strategies around the holidays that manage loneliness and help individuals to move through it.

1. Maintain realistic expectations

There can be an overwhelming amount of pressure around the holidays to host parties, engage in gift exchanges, bake treats or visit family and friends. This pressure to perform can often produce feelings of alienation and disconnection, especially when we realize we just can't do it all. In response, take your needs into consideration and prioritize. Resolve to do only what you can without sacrificing your physical, mental and emotional health. Be aware of triggers from your past experiences and plan for them. Holiday optimism can sometimes lead to [unrealistic expectations that this year will be different](#), ultimately ending in compounded disappointment. Instead, use past experiences to draw boundaries that avoid rekindling painful memories or unhealthy patterns of behaviour.

2. Get involved

While finding the time and energy to branch out during a difficult time can be hard, research shows that the most powerful tool against loneliness is getting connected to a supportive community. The [positive effects of social interactions offer a plethora of health benefits](#). Therefore, if you are suffering from seasonal loneliness, try not to isolate yourself. Instead, reach out! Use resources like Medisys On-Demand. Search for local clubs, [meetups](#), and events. Ask local community centres or religious institutions about volunteer opportunities. Meet with friends, family or neighbours to make plans or organize an event of your own. [Hug someone](#). Above all, communicate with the people around you that you could use their support during this difficult time.

3. Practice gratitude and give back to someone less fortunate

Research shows that feelings of social connectedness are [internal and subjective](#), meaning that they are not a reflection of the number of friends a person has. In other words, you can have 1000 friends and still feel lonely. But social actions that facilitate a connection with others generate a positive feedback loop of social, emotional and physical well-being. Therefore, if

you are struggling with seasonal loneliness, try to focus on the things you have to be grateful for instead of what is missing. Think of positive ways you can help others that may have less than you. In the process, you may find that the love and light you share with others will in turn nourish your own soul!

4. Spend quality time with yourself

It's important to remember that spending the holidays alone does not necessarily equate to feeling lonely. In fact, having time off from everyday responsibilities can be a great opportunity to indulge in some very special activities or treats. If you will be alone this holiday; try ordering in or making a special meal, watching films, taking a bath or journaling. Check out local libraries, galleries, museums or cinemas as many have special exhibits or concerts during the holiday season. Give yourself permission to enjoy your own company.

5. Stay active

The positive psychological and physiological effects of regular exercise are [well-documented](#). Luckily, exercise is not only good for your overall health, it also releases feel-good chemicals that counteract the negative effects of loneliness. Group exercise classes or sports teams can also be a good way to make friends and get involved in a community.

6. Limit time on social media

While Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and other social media sites may promise to connect us to our friends, a [study](#) from the University of Indiana reports that there is a strong correlation between social media use and self-reported levels of loneliness. According to the study, decreasing the amount of time spent on social media platforms resulted in lower rates of self-reported depression, anxiety, and loneliness. Around the holidays, navigating the online world can be especially hard. Profiles are inevitably filled with posts about family gatherings and significant others. Therefore, try to limit the amount of time you spend online.

Loneliness can be hard to cope with at any time of the year, but it can be especially difficult during the holidays when the pressure is on and societal expectations are high. Practice self-care by being realistic, getting involved, giving back, spending quality time with yourself, staying active and limiting time on social media. Soon, you will feel back on track to reaping the benefits of social connectedness. You can always learn more virtual care solutions with Medisys On-Demand.