



# BHS A.S.S.I.S.T. Spotlight

*December 2021*

Your EAP is a free and confidential service, which provides assessment and short-term counseling for a variety of mental health, substance abuse and work/life related issues. To learn more about your available benefits, contact your BHS Care Coordinator at 800.245.1150.



Make the Holidays Your Own

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## Make the Holidays Your Own

And with a blink of an eye, it's that time of year again. Look at a calendar and you're presented with pictures of the perfect holiday scenarios. There are kids playing in the snow, large families happily gathering around a feast and lovestruck couples exchanging gifts in front of a fireplace. The pressure is on to recreate the holiday images for yourself—or else! But what about those people who aren't represented in the snapshots? Those that are single, divorced, without children or part of blended families. The truth is that the pressure can become too much for many people but it doesn't have to be. Make the holidays your own by creating your own traditions.

### Figure out what you want.

Essentially, holiday stress is caused by unrealistic expectations. Focus on your own needs and desires for this time of year and don't focus on recreating a scene from a classic Christmas movie. Set aside a couple of days before the holidays to spend with yourself to examine what you are looking for during the holidays. Are the holidays about extended family or seclusion? Is this the time to explore or reconnect with religion or reach out to help strangers? Forget about what others may say, what do you want your holiday traditions to be?

### Going it alone, or not.

Those that are single might look into volunteer work at a nearby soup kitchen, food drive or homeless shelter. Maybe you want to self-indulgently spend a day relaxing at a spa, outdoors or jet setting to a tropical destination. Rely upon your family or friends who may have plenty of interesting things planned. Maybe you are helping them fulfill their tradition. The holidays also tend to put extra pressure on new relationships, whether it's a new romance or new family

dynamic. Remember not to force things because now is not the time. Chances are the new people in your life will feel relief as well without the rush of loaded expectations.

### Blending a family means staying flexible.

For kids and adults of blended families, thinking of past celebrations bring back memories, good and bad. It's important for each side of the family to discuss what they are used to and what the new family can do to make things special. Be open to combining traditions or starting fresh. While planning can be complicated for divided families, kids often don't mind celebrating more than once—in a different way in each home—no matter what date the celebration falls upon.

### Timing is everything.

If you decide to change your holidays up a bit it's best to start early. Don't spring it on your loved ones last minute by backing out of a family meal and announcing a solo trip, or throw a new tradition at the kids on Christmas Eve. You may have shifted your outlook, but it could take time for others to join you. Change isn't always easy, especially when people are presented with images of holidays past that were not ever quite real. But once you can let go of unrealistic expectations, visualize what you need and take the holidays into your own hands, you are one step closer to having a stress-free season worth remembering.

**Your Employee Assistance Program (EAP) provides free and confidential financial consultations with accountants and certified financial professionals. For more information, call Behavioral Health Systems at 800-245-1150.**



## Fighting Depression During the Holidays

As the holidays approach and another year comes to an end, many enter a period of reflection. Reflection can offer an opportunity to revel in the many exciting events of the year, or it can cause us to be consumed with self-doubt and regret. Instead of focusing on the promotions, new friends and exciting vacations, for example, people remember all of things they had hoped to accomplish—losing weight, going back to school, learning to cook—the list can be endless and overwhelming. Fortunately, the challenges that come with managing depression during the holidays are not impossible.

### Recognizing the Signs and Symptoms

Identify the issue. While the signs and symptoms of depression can vary, there are some hallmarks that can alert you or those around you that you may be feeling a bit down examples are: fatigue, eating more or less, sleeping more or less, inability to concentrate, feelings of worthlessness, depressed mood most of the time and lack of interest in activities that you used to enjoy.

One of the most important factors in identifying these changes is self-awareness. Do yourself a favor and take note of how you generally live your life. Do you get together with friends on a weekly basis, enjoy hiking or go to the gym often? If you wake up one day in December and have a difficult time remembering the last time you did any of these, it might be a sign that you are not acting or feeling like yourself.

### Preventing Depression

Depression is not impossible to overcome. If you are prone to feeling down during the holidays, plan your preemptive attack now!

**Create a plan for your holiday.** Goals give you something to focus on and preoccupy your mind. Fill your mind with something exciting and productive this holiday. Not into the holly jolly of the season? Dedicate some time to volunteer work or spend time catching up with some old friends.

**Create new traditions.** Are you spending your first holiday away from your family? If so, change your focus from reminiscing of holidays past to making new holiday traditions.

### Finding Solutions

Take action as soon as you realize that a depressed mood has crept into your life. Remember that waiting until later may leave you with less energy or motivation as depressive symptoms have a tendency to intensify.

**Regroup and reorganize.** When you realize that something has gone awry, develop a new game plan. Take a step back and evaluate what has changed in your life. Make a list of what is lacking in your life and what may need to be cut.

**Be kind to yourself.** While the holiday season reminds us to be nice and generous to others, it is also important to be kind to yourself. If you find yourself feeling sad or tearful, know that it is ok. You are human, you are capable. You can survive the holiday season!

**If you are concerned about your mental health during the holiday season, don't hesitate to seek advice. Your Employee Assistance Program (EAP) provides free and confidential assessment and counseling services. BHS is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week by calling 800-245-1150.**



## Top 10 Mental Health Benefits of Exercise

**#1: Reduces Stress** Exercise increases concentrations of *norepinephrine*, which moderates the brain's response to stress. It boosts the body's ability to deal with existing physical symptoms that stress and worrying creates.

**#2: Alleviates Depression** Endorphins are released during exercise, which create feelings of happiness and euphoria. Studies show that exercise can treat mild to moderate depression as effectively as antidepressant medication.

**#3: Alleviates Anxiety** Exercise is a natural and effective anti-anxiety treatment. It relieves tension and stress. It boosts physical and mental energy and enhances wellbeing.

**#4: Reduces Symptoms of Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)** Exercise boosts the brain's *norepinephrine*, *dopamine* and *serotonin* levels—all of which affect focus and attention—improving concentration, motivation, memory and mood. Exercise works in much the same way as medication prescribed to treat ADHD.

**#5: Reduces Symptoms of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder** The body focus required during exercise can help the

nervous system become “unstuck” and begin to move out of the immobilization stress response.

**#6: Shapes Memory and Brainpower** Exercise stimulates the growth of new brain cells and helps prevent age-related decline. It increases production of cells in the hippocampus and levels of a *brain-derived protein (BDNF)*, which helps with decision-making and learning.

**#7: Supports Higher Self-Esteem** Investment in your mind, body, and soul fosters a sense of self-worth, sense of empowerment, positive self-image and sense of achievement.

**#8: Improves Sleep** Short bursts of exercise can help regulate your sleep patterns. Exercise raises the body's core temperature. The return to normal temperature post-exercise signals the body it's time to sleep.

**#9: Increase Energy and Productivity** Research shows that regular exercise boosts energy levels and increases work productivity.

**#10: Fosters Stronger Resilience** Exercise boosts the immune system and reduces the impact of stress. This provides a healthy coping mechanism for mental or emotional life challenges.

### HEALTHY RECIPE: Grinch Fruit Kabobs

10 toothpicks; 10 mini marshmallows; 10 strawberries, tops removed; 1 banana, sliced into 10 rounds; 10 green grapes

1. Wash the fruit
2. With each toothpick, assemble your kabob with one of each item as listed above.
3. Enjoy and refrigerate leftovers up to 1 day. <https://www.momables.com/grinch-fruit-kabobs/>

