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Is This Just the Holiday Blues?

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The approaching holidays, decreased home values, rising cost of living. These things alone could make anyone depressed. But if the holidays conjure up memories of happier times, if you experienced a loss during the holidays or if you live alone and are without family close by, this time of the year can be even more difficult.

Depression is a serious illness that if not treated can lead to physical health issues, decreased quality of life, and relationship losses. It is not a normal part of aging. Symptoms of depression include a persistent or anxious mood, loss of interest in ordinary activities, fatigue, sleep and eating problems, irritability, and difficulty concentrating or making decisions. If you experience these feelings for an extended period of time (more than 3 or 4 months), it is important to speak with a professional, whether it is your health care provider or a therapist.

If these feelings are short-lived, some lifestyle changes may help your mood.

- 1. Worried about money with the holidays fast approaching? Rather than buy a gift: meet a friend for lunch, make homemade gifts (craft item, baked goods), spend the day with the grandkids looking at neighborhood holiday decorations or at a free holiday community event. Many times the person receiving the gift would rather just spend time with you.
- 2. **Lonely?** Make an effort to see people who make you happy and who you enjoy being around. Volunteer. Not only is there the satisfaction of helping other, you are surrounded by positive people. Pets are also wonderful companions who give you unconditional love. If owning a pet is not possible, volunteer at an animal shelter or veterinary clinic.
- 3. **Past holiday loss?** This could be the year that you start a new tradition with family or friends. You'll never forget your loved one, but starting a new holiday tradition will make new, happy memories.
- 4. **Sad only during the winter?** You may be affected by Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD). This disorder is thought to occur when the days become shorter and there is less natural light exposure. Light therapy and artificial light exposure can help with the effects of SAD.

The Orange County Office on Aging can connect you with community resources and organizations that can help you get through this rough time or places looking for some great volunteers. Call **1-800-510-2020** or **1-714-567-7500** and speak the friendly and helpful Office on Aging Information Specialists.

