

# Your Mind Matters

## Preserve Your Brain Health for Your Best Life



### FEATURED ARTICLE

## Dealing with Loneliness this Holiday Season

The holidays... so filled with peace, joy and love... and loneliness.

Many people look forward to these special days. Spending time with friends and loved ones, enjoying good food and drink, giving and receiving gifts. This time of year can be quite an ongoing celebration... unless it's not.

Perhaps family members can't or don't want to travel, or they become ill and they can't make it this season. Perhaps others have moved away. Even worse, maybe family dynamics are such that a get-together is not going to happen this year.

No matter the reason, all of the excitement that leads up to this notoriously overrated holiday season is a recipe for loneliness. And for some, it can cause a feeling of dread.

### **What can you do to feel better about the holidays?**

When it comes to being alone, mindset is the first key to maintaining perspective. A little self-compassion and care can go a long way in learning how to relish and enjoy solitude when you have to.

Diverting your attention by doing something new and interesting like a hobby or a craft is helpful. Read a good book and reach out to friends and relatives by telephone or on a video chat, if you can. You might even give yourself some love by taking the occasional warm bath or spa treatment.

Any of these can lift your spirit during difficult times.

### **Lower your expectations.**

It's easy to get caught up in it all. The television commercials. The holiday sales. The holiday musical loop on every radio station. It builds up our expectations, but when reality doesn't meet those expectations, it sets us up to be let-down.

Hollywood (and social media) has convinced us all that perfection is the key to happiness – perfect love, perfect relationships, and lots of it every day. That's how everyone else's life is... isn't it?

This barrage of messaging on a daily basis builds up our expectations unrealistically. By adjusting your expectations – such as knowing it's okay to go with a friend to a party rather than a romantic partner – can help temper the feeling of loneliness.

### **Make an effort to connect with others.**

When you're out and about, make an effort to initiate conversation with neighbors and acquaintances you meet along the way. Call friends and reconnect, send holiday cards - do whatever you need to do to strengthen bonds between you and others. This can serve to make you feel more connected and less lonely.

### **Embrace gratitude.**

Loneliness is just one more manifestation of something called a "scarcity mindset" – meaning that we feel as if

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we don't "have enough" of something or we are "not enough". Fortunately, there's a proven solution to this problem – it's called *gratitude*. Gratitude causes you to *have everything you want and to want everything you have*.

If you're focused on the lack of loving relationships in your life, extend your focus to the relationships you do have – family, friends and even your pets. When you focus on those wonderful things, that's all you'll be thinking about, because your brain won't be able to focus on both the good and the bad at the same time.

To do this right, get a dedicated notebook. Two or three times a day, write down at least three things in your life that bring you joy – then write down **why** these things bring you joy. That second step is an important one because as you write it, *you'll actually feel the joy*.

By Marilyn Abrahamson - Brain-Health Education Specialist at Ceresti Health.

### **Give, give, give.**

It's only natural that helping others who are less fortunate will make you feel better. Giving causes the release of the feel-good hormones called *endorphins*, making you feel loving and proud.

Giving to others who have less also helps out your life in perspective, filling you with a sense of gratitude for your own life. Being a part of something greater than yourself will make you feel immersed in the spirit of the holiday season – without the feeling of loneliness.

### **Give yourself time to feel better.**

It's important to recognize whether you're experiencing a seasonal feeling of loneliness or if this is an ongoing feeling for you. Nothing will work instantly and it's not out of the ordinary for your feelings to linger a bit after the holidays but if this feeling doesn't go away, it may be time to talk to a trusted friend, family member or a licensed therapist.

# Protecting Yourself and Your Family this Holiday Season

This time of year, for people of all ages, it's common to see an uptick in viruses like colds, flu and now, the Covid-19 virus.

## **Covid-19**

Covid-19 vaccines have been shown to be effective at protecting people from becoming seriously ill, being hospitalized, or dying. The CDC recommends staying current with the updated (bivalent) booster, even if you've already had Covid-19. As with other vaccine-preventable diseases, staying up to date with all recommended vaccines and boosters is the best way to stay protected.

That means receiving an updated (bivalent) booster if it has been at least two months since being given the last Covid-19 vaccine dose. For those who have recently had Covid-19, CDC recommends delaying the next dose (primary dose or booster) by three months from the initial positive Covid-19 test.

For those with a compromised or weakened immune system, CDC recommends talking to the doctor about getting an extra primary-series dose, if receiving either the Moderna or Pfizer-BioNTech series.

## **Seasonal Flu**

Seasonal flu (or the influenza virus) is a contagious respiratory virus that infects the nose, throat and lungs. Anyone can get sick with the flu, and it can happen at any age – even people that are healthy can get sick. Some people are at a higher risk, particularly those that are over age 65 and those with chronic medical conditions such as diabetes, asthma, heart disease, women that are pregnant and young children.

*Some additional facts about the season flu are:*

- It can cause illness that ranges from mild to severe.
- Millions of people become sick with the flu each year in the U.S.
- Hundreds of thousands are hospitalized.
- Thousands to tens of thousands die from the flu.
- The most effective way to prevent the flu is by getting an annual flu vaccine.

With all of the holiday gatherings at this time of year, it's the perfect time to ask your doctor how getting the Covid-19 and flu vaccines can help protect you and your family.

## TAKE CARE OF YOU

### SELF-CARE TIPS FOR SURVIVING THE HOLIDAYS

#### **Be realistic in your expectations.**

Hollywood, social media and society have romanticized the holiday season. They have created the illusion that we should all be happy, healthy and together in perfect harmony. Reality has shown us that this is rarely the case, however when life doesn't live up to that fantasy, we tend to feel let down, and sometimes even lonely and depressed. By becoming aware that these expectations are not realistic, you can begin to adjust your perspective to lessen, or even eliminate disappointment when they don't turn out the way you'd hoped they would.

#### **Remember to be safe on your travels.**

If you are older and have challenges getting around, be aware of items in other peoples' homes that can cause you to trip and fall. Things like small dogs or cats, throw rugs, door mats or even electrical wires can be hazardous, especially if you're unfamiliar with the home.

#### **When visiting, keep an eye on the weather.**

In most parts of the U.S. the weather can be quite unpredictable in December. Take care when walking from your car to the front door, wear sturdy shoes or boots that have soles that grip in case of ice. Be extra careful on walkways and on steps, always using the railings. Dressing in layers can help you to stay warmer and more comfortable and will give you more options if the house you're visiting is chilly.

#### **Remember your dietary needs.**

The holidays are notorious for decadent menus with choices that are high in fat and sugar. Nothing will ruin a good party more than eating a fatty food that doesn't sit well or a sweet treat that sets your glucose levels soaring. If the host is a friend or family member, talk to them beforehand and ask if they would be kind enough to offer something that fits within any dietary restrictions you may have. Otherwise, it might be a good idea to bring something of your own.

#### **Enjoy!**

No matter how many parties you attend or how many gifts you receive (even if it's just one small get-together among a few friends or family), always remember the big picture – *connection with others*. Connection and socialization is essential to ward off loneliness and depression.

So, even if you can only connect by telephone or video chat, reach out and make those connections.

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For more information about brain health or caregiver support please visit the **Ceresti Brain Health Education portal** at [brainhealth.ceresti.com](https://brainhealth.ceresti.com) and enter code **GIVECARE**.

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Your health plan has partnered with Ceresti to offer you the **Ceresti Family Support Program**. To determine if you are eligible for this program, contact (442) 273-2256.

## MONTHLY BRAIN CHALLENGE

# Category Loops



*Let's work on word retrieval and analytical thinking. To fire-up your processing speed, set a time for two minutes as you do this puzzle!*

*Complete the word grid by finding a word starting with the letter on the left side of the grid in each of the three categories at the top.*

	Country	Animal	Food
S			
A			
N			
T			
A			