HOLIDAY BLUES

Christmas shopping, decorating, baking, parties, and missing family members – it's not hard to see why the holiday season can cause stress, anxiety, and even depression. You may not be able to totally prevent the "holiday blues," but with proactive steps, you may be able lessen them and enjoy the holiday more than you thought you would.

Set realistic expectations. The holidays don't have to be perfect. They don't have to be just like last year, or just like they were when you were a kid. Times change. People change. The holidays can change, too. Cherish traditions, but look for fresh ways to celebrate and build new memories.

Reach beyond differences. None of us get along with everyone. This holiday, set aside your differences with family members. Move past the hurts of the past and try to recognize the value of each person. Extend kindness to others – it will help lift your spirits, too.

Plan ahead. Holidays can get busy and expensive very quickly. Lower financial stress by setting a budget for yourself before you go shopping. Make a list to make sure you get everything you need and don't have to make extra trips that may lead to impulse buying. Suggest your family do a gift exchange instead of buying gifts for everyone. Give creative gifts like homemade items, a donation in a loved one's name, or a gift of your time.

Stay on track. The holiday hustle can disrupt your daily routine. Stay on track by getting plenty of sleep, building physical activity into each day, and taking time for yourself. Find a way to relax, even for just 15 minutes a day. Try to eat small healthy snacks throughout the day and limit your sweets.

Seek professional help if you need it. Sometimes, despite our best efforts, we just can't seem to kick the holiday blues. If you find yourself feeling persistently sad or anxious, having difficulty sleeping, feeling irritable or hopeless, or feeling physically sick, reach out to your health care provider or a mental health professional. They can offer support and help you navigate the holidays – maybe even get to the point where you can enjoy it!

The Montgomery County Health Department loves taking care of your family, and works every day to protect, promote and improve health in our community. To learn more, call 573-564-2495 or visit us online at www.montgomerycountyhealth.org or on Facebook or Twitter @healthyMOCO. ∎