

# Fa-la-la-la Funk

*Carole and Ronald Krist Samaritan Center for Counseling and Education*

The decorations are up, but you're still feeling down. If holiday pressures have snowballed into depression, here are 10 ways to cope.

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With so many people wishing each other glad tidings of comfort and joy, we should all be feeling pretty good, right about now. But the weeks between Thanksgiving and Valentine's Day include some of the coldest, darkest and most stressful days of the year.

"Holiday blues are a normal reaction to life stresses, and the sad or depressed moods are only temporary," says Dr. A. Scott Winter, president of the Fort Worth chapter of the Texas Society of Psychiatric Physicians and associate professor of psychiatry at Texas College of Osteopathic Medicine.

"The holiday blues require management of your stressors, a good listener and a little time," Winter says. "The 'blues' do not involve suicidal thinking. We don't see many people with the blues in psychiatric clinics, nor should we."

The difference between holiday blues and clinical depression or Seasonal Affective Disorder, known as SAD, has mostly to do with the duration and severity of the depression. If you are a little down or out of sorts for a couple of weeks and calling a friend, taking a walk or watching a few good movies cheers you up, it's probably the blues. If you are depressed during the darkest months, year after year, it is probably SAD. Clinical depression is more severe and occurs for a more prolonged period; this type of depression requires counseling and often medication.

People need to remember that maintaining mental and physical health is more important than anything else they might be doing during the holidays, says Tammy Heinz, director of outreach for the Mental Health Association of Tarrant County. No one, she says, should sacrifice their own well-being to self-imposed expectations.

"Try to cut yourself some slack," Heinz says. "If you feel overwhelmed by all the things you feel you have to do, step back and look to see if there are some things that if [you] don't get them done, it will not be catastrophic."

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