Be happy - Banish holiday depression and stress!

Are you feeling sad, wretched or miserable as the holiday approaches?

For many, this can be a time filled with sadness and loneliness. Many persons get depressed and stressed out at this time of the year because of unrealistic expectations, too many demands, and not being able to see family and friends.

It can be very difficult for persons who have lost loved ones, those who are experiencing financial stress, and persons who have lost their job or are not working. For persons who are living with depression these can be challenging times. Some persons also suffer from seasonal depression, also called seasonal affective disorder. This disorder affects persons at this time of the year when the days are shorter, the nights longer, and there is less exposure to sunlight. Here are some tips to deal with holiday depression and stress: 1 Deal with demands. - Manage the demands that are made on you. I find that at this time of the year, persons expect me to attend parties, give gifts, and some persons expect money. It is impossible to respond to all these demands, and merely thinking of it can be stressful. Do not feel guilty if you can't respond to all the demands. You have to determine what you can and cannot do. 2 Make realistic expectations. - It is also important that we are realistic in terms of our own expectations for the holidays. Times are tough on everyone. This holiday may not be like previous ones. You may not be able to celebrate as you did in the past. Persons may not be able to travel and visit you as they did in the past. Others may not be able to give as they have done in the past. Everyone is scaling down to meet the tough and rough times. 3 Family and friends matter. - Reach out to family and friends for the holidays. It may be a simple act of kindness that will make a difference in someone else's life. A kind word, a thoughtful prayer, a telephone call or a short visit. 4 Budget. - This is the time of the year when many persons overspend. Everything is designed to make you spend more. The commercials, the well-decorated shops, the playing of carols, to name a few. They are done to create a feel-good atmosphere and to make us spend. Monitor your spending and make a budget. If you are one who tends to overspend, avoid the malls and put away those credit cards. 5 Volunteer. - I have found great happiness in giving of my service and time. I encourage us all to do that this year. It is in giving that we receive, and it is in giving that we are truly blessed. Give of your time and talent to a worthy cause this holiday. Visit a nursing home, donate something to a children's home, or give to a charity or some worthy cause. But give, give and keep giving. You will be blessed. 6 Seek professional help. - Some persons get very depressed at this time. If you are one of those individuals, you may want to seek counselling or other professional help. Dr Wendel Abel is a consultant psychiatrist and head, Section of Psychiatry, Dept. Of Community Health and Psychiatry, University of the West Indies; email: yourhealth@gleanerjm.com.