

Surgeons Corner January 23, 2022

I am writing the last post for the year as we are entering Christmas and New Year. For many, the holidays are a time to reflect on blessings, enjoy time with family, and take a well-earned time off. For others, the holidays may be the most difficult time of the year. That is true for many veterans. The VA recognizes this fact and provides guidance on how to maneuver the difficulties.

Veterans may experience mental health concerns such as depression and anxiety, as the holidays can be a time of loneliness and sadness. Veterans can experience difficulties adjusting to civilian life as they transition from service to civilian life.

Stress may increase the symptoms of posttraumatic stress disorder. APA (2006) notes that stress, and the accompanying unhealthy behaviors such as alcohol use and overeating, contribute to some of our US's biggest health problems. Unhealthy stress is linked to health issues such as obesity, heart disease and diabetes. These health issues can be prevented or reduced when you take steps to address holiday stress in healthier ways such as exercising and mindfulness.

The holidays can also highlight certain dates or anniversaries and create feelings of guilt. Ignoring your mental health can lead to depression and anxiety. It is very important that you know how to recognize depression and anxiety.

Symptoms of depression:

- Fatigue
- Irritability
- Difficulty sleeping
- Headaches
- Excessive drinking
- Overeating

Symptoms of anxiety:

- Feeling restless, wound up, or on edge
- Being easily fatigued
- Having difficulty concentrating
- Being irritable
- Having headaches, muscle aches, stomachaches or unexplained pains
- Difficulty controlling feelings of worry
- Difficulty falling or staying asleep

There are however ways to focus on your mental health and keep your stress levels in check over the next few weeks. Do not ignore the symptoms, or worse suppress them. Suppressing your emotions usually lead to poor outcomes such as cardiovascular problems, cognitive problems, and relationship problems. A better way is to use techniques such as focused breathing, progressive muscle relaxation, exercise, yoga, dance, and meditation. Calling a friend is always a good thing to do when you are having problems. If you are feeling overwhelmed, seek help from a mental health professional. If you are in distress, please call 988.

I hope that you and your loved ones will have a wonderful Christmas and a happy new year.

References:

<https://www.apa.org/news/press/releases/2006/12/holiday-stress>

<https://news.va.gov/113447/helping-veterans-manage-holiday-stress/>

If you are in distress, call or text 988

<http://veteranscrisisline.net>

Mindfulness app

<https://mobile.va.gov/app/mindfulness-coach>

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