

The New Holiday Menace

Forget the Grinch. Here comes the Holiday Anxiety Demon.

By Faust Ruggiero, M.S.

Each year brings the excitement of the holiday season, complete with festive dinners, grandma's eggnog, parties, presents, and all that good cheer. It's the time for good will, hugs and kisses, and family and friends. The holidays are supposed to bring out the best in everyone, and for the most part, they do.

Unfortunately, we can also find an unwanted guest who has invited itself to enjoy all the holiday merriment, at our expense. Introducing the *holiday anxiety demon!* While we're all feasting on turkey dinners, shopping, attending the usual Christmas parties, and exchanging wonderful, and not so wonderful gifts, the demon is relishing in our tendency to become over-excited, and over-emotional. It lurks out of sight, disguising itself as the passion and excitement that is connected to the best time of the year. And this, my friends, is the food that fuels this insidious little holiday-killing nemesis.

As we continue to infuse the holidays with passion, love, faith, and family, our emotions begin to soar. Holiday adrenaline kicks in, and so do all the expectations, the "love-em-hate-em" family gatherings, and the toss your schedule aside holiday ride. Welcome to holiday insanity, sponsored by you are friendly holiday anxiety demon. Who needs the grinch?

Everyone has just a bit of anxiety, and some of us have that much more. Some of us attempt to gear down and welcome the holidays with a sane and healthy approach. Others, however, approach it like they do most of their lives. Emotions rule the discourse, expectations must be met, life's pace goes through the roof, and drama and chaos have become an accepted holiday tradition.

The signs that the anxiety demon is taking over your holiday world:

- You feel more emotional than you usually do.
- You are sleeping less than usual.
- Your internal language is becoming more negative or aggressive.
- You're becoming more intolerant with other people, and you are overreacting, often criticizing or attacking others.
- Old negative events and memories have made their way back into your world.

- Physically, you feel rundown and exhausted, but you can't seem to relax.
- Everything around you is moving too fast, and you're having a difficult time organizing your world.
- Your personal relationships are becoming strained, emotional, and are beginning to feel toxic.
- You feel as though you have to do everything, and no one else is helping out.
- You're experiencing a rise in self-medication rituals like substance abuse, and comfort eating.
- No matter how much you do, you feel overwhelmed, with mounds of unfinished business.
- You're beginning to experience panic attacks.

We can experience many of these life changes outside of the holiday season. During the holiday season, however, anxiety and anxious situations seem to reach optimal levels, and their effects can stretch far beyond the end of the season. It's so important, not only to understand the signs, but to prepare your body, your mind, and your emotions for the holiday demon's inevitable appearance.

Helpful ways to keep the anxiety demon from ruling your holiday world:

- ✓ Have a plan to stay as close to your normal schedule as possible.
- ✓ Stay away from artificial accelerants, even if you think you need them to keep pace with the holiday season.
- ✓ If you can, have a ritual to reduce the pace of your life, such as meditation, prayer, yoga, or exercise.
- ✓ Stay away from social media and other types of media presentations that accelerate your emotions.
- ✓ Try to reduce your indulgence in the commercial part of the holiday season. Focus on family, friends, and the true meaning of the holidays.
- ✓ Build temporary escape periods into your holiday season. Try to unplug from the holiday grind long enough to catch your breath.
- ✓ Be careful with self-soothing methods like overindulging in alcohol, other drugs, and overeating.
- ✓ If you feel yourself becoming more negative, it might be a good idea to talk to someone. Get out of your own head.
- ✓ Stay close to a healthy sleep routine. Holidays have a tendency to cause interrupted sleep patterns, as well as a mild to significant loss of sleep.

- ✓ The holidays can be full of negative self-fulfilling prophecies. Try not to make negative holiday predictions, followed by doing everything in your power to see them come true. Make every attempt to infuse your holiday season with as much positive energy as you can.
- ✓ Be as calm as you can. Get away from the notion that you are supposed to be “just a little overexcited” during the holiday season. Keep things in perspective.
- ✓ Try to reduce your expectations. A significant part of holiday dysfunction is based on trying to do it your way, and expecting others to come along for the ride. Be willing to compromise.
- ✓ Go into the holidays with a positive mindset. If you are dreading them, or are attaching negative or angry thoughts to them, the holiday anxiety demon has already infiltrated your world. Try to go with the flow, and decide to experience them for the blessing they can be. This can set the stage for a wonderful holiday experience.
- ✓ Before the holiday season commences, make your most important priority a holiday season that is positive and relaxing. When it’s over, you want to feel good about what you experienced. You can have as much control over what happens to you during your holiday season as you program into it.

Everything increases during the holidays. We see family more often, there is more travel, more money spent, and considerably more emotions felt, and expressed. It will be emotional, but it doesn't have to be painful.

We tend to go into the holidays with our holiday autopilot securely engaged, and our rational intellect unplugged. Before you know it, that holiday anxiety demon is staring you in the face. Stay focused, and bring some conscious planning into your holiday season. Make a decision to enter the holiday season simply focused on the holiday spirit. Love, enjoy, and feel good. Send the demon and the grinch packing, and out of your world.

Merry Christmas, and a wonderful holiday season to all of you!

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