



Thanksgiving with Joy, Good Food, and Loneliness

Dr. Charles Shaffer

Researchers at Brigham Young University discovered that loneliness and social isolation can be as damaging to your health as smoking 15 cigarettes a day. It is mainly an issue for seniors and college-aged individuals as they are typically away from their family for long periods of time.

Some people agree the holidays are socially isolating. Others say they feel their social relations and interactions are not as meaningful. For example, the average household size in the United States has declined in the past decade, leading to a 10% increase in people living alone. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, $\frac{1}{4}$ of the U.S. population, about 28% of older adults, live by themselves.

Right now, most of the world is in the hustle and bustle of the holiday season. This includes sending greeting cards, gift shopping, and other holiday-related activities.

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According to Dr. Hall at the University of Washington, many people have admitted they don't feel as if they fit in with the expectations of the holiday season. Despite all the greeting cards you may receive, it is still easy to feel scared and lonely. It is highly important to remember this feeling will not last forever. Many of those who struggle with obesity tend to turn towards food as their comfort.

Over the years, the Weigh Station has seen holiday weight gain range from 20 – 35 pounds. It is easy to slip into old habits or eat something because “everyone else is”. Additionally, social media expectations can put an undue amount of pressure on individuals. Social media and television have created an unrealistic expectation of what the holidays “should be”. Dr. Walker at Wake Forrest University says to “be realistic and focus on the here and now” and to “avoid comparing your experience with others”.

Take a break from social media this holiday season. Look for somethings to do that you enjoy, like reading a book or booking a memorable getaway for yourself. Whatever it is, have a firm idea on what you want to do on a particular day. It will help solidify your expectations and help you feel more in control of the holiday season, especially around Thanksgiving.

It's elementary to get caught up in reminiscing about how the holidays used to be in the past, when you lived closer to your friends and family. Just because the holidays aren't the same as they used to be, doesn't mean it can't be enjoyable. Try something new such as volunteering, attending local events, or watching the latest movie at the theater. Friends-giving is a great example of a new way to celebrate the season. Get creative!

If you're having trouble with this, try to reach out to a mental health expert. They can help you identify barriers and help you when things don't feel always feel okay.

Distractions can be a helpful way to get through the season. Give yourself a break from stressful thoughts and habits. This can help prevent burnout and help you deal with your problems in a healthier manner. Pamper yourself, indulge in your favorite activity, or take a mental break with a movie or book. All of this won't eliminate the feeling of loneliness but trying to care for yourself is a much better to enjoy the solitude.

To control your weight, do not keep comfort foods around for longer than needed. Extra pies, cakes, and other desserts can be donated to your local food bank.

Remember, it is not Thanksgiving if you're not thankful for what you have throughout the year. There are many beautiful things in life to be thankful for.

If you have lost loved ones, pray for yourself and all those around. The hurt may stay but you can find comfort with those who feel the same.

The Weigh Station is happy to help in any way we can. Please remember to look at the holiday recipes that are published each year. It's a great way to not lose sight of the goal that you set for yourself.

We wish everyone a happy and healthy holiday season. Please be safe and make smart choices. If you slip up, don't worry. There is always another day to get back on track!

Blessings to all,
Chuck Shaffer MD

The Recipe of the Month

Melissa's Non- (2 cups of fruit, serves 4)

Ingredients

- Fresh peaches or apples
- Stevia
- Cinnamon

Directions

Peel, pit, seed, and slice apples or peaches. Preheat oven to 375 degrees. Spray baking dish with non-stick cooking spray. Evenly distribute the fruit in the dish. Sprinkle with Stevia and toss, ensuring all pieces are coated. Then sprinkle fruit with cinnamon. Bake for 20-30 minutes or until fruit is fork tender. Serve warm.

