

Beating the post-holiday blues

Question: I'm feeling very sad this year now that the holidays are over and I'm not sure why. I don't usually feel this way in January but here I am crying and not wanting to do much of anything. Christmas was fine this year ? no family fights or anything. The kids were home for the holidays and the youngest one left yesterday to go back to school in Ottawa. Could it be the weird weather this year that's affecting me? I really hated to see the snow come after it was feeling like spring in December.

Answer: You are not alone in feeling somewhat saddened at the end of the holidays. Many people deplete themselves both physically and emotionally during the preparations for and participation in the events of the season. Excess consumption of rich foods and drink can leave people feeling sluggish. Add to that the strong possibility that someone has brought home a cold or the flu and it becomes increasingly likely that people may be in worse physical shape after the holidays than before them. Physical illness and the consumption of alcohol can both contribute to depressive feelings.

But even if you were out exercising every day and didn't over-indulge in holiday fare, there are other reasons that people may feel sad as the new year begins. You have alluded to several of them in your question. Particular to this year is the late coming of winter which while enjoyable was also deceptive. Just as the winter wheat began to sprout in December in response to the rains and spring-like breezes (with potentially disastrous consequences when spring 2016 really does arrive), so our spirits began to rise as if spring were really here. Just as some of the birds were fooled into singing and perhaps thinking about nesting, our own biological rhythms were affected. What a rude shock then both physically and emotionally to find that we have not skipped the winter at all! Just as our bodies are having to adjust quickly to the frigid temperatures (instead of gradually all fall), so we must deal emotionally with the delayed hope of greenness and renewal.

You also mention the leaving of your youngest child to return to school far away. Having children home and around us again for the holidays can be joyous and bring back memories of earlier shared times. For many parents, it's also a wrench when children go back to their sometimes far distant lives at the end of the holidays. If your youngest only left home recently, you may be reminded that your nest is now truly empty and you may feel sad, at least for a while, until the activities of the new year begin in earnest. And finally, more generally, most people don't like to see a good party or vacation end, especially if they're stuck taking down the decorations.

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