



COMMISSIONER'S COMMENTS



For A Happy, Healthy Holiday Season, Begin with a Good Night's Sleep and a Walk

With the holiday season in full swing comes an array of activities: Entertaining, visiting friends and family, traveling and extra occasions to eat, cook, clean and shop. For many, the hustle and bustle also prompts feelings of stress and depression.

Missing a loved one or unrealistic expectations can set the stage for problems. Fortunately, there are a few practical ways to be proactive and help minimize these difficulties that unfortunately arise during the holiday season.

First, it bears repeating from one of my earlier columns: Sleep is the foundation of both good mental and physical health. Last month, striking results from a new study were revealed that may prompt the most significant advance in depression treatment since Prozac was introduced in the late 1980s. The research, funded by the National Institute of Mental Health, found that those who were able to eliminate their insomnia were almost twice as likely to resolve their depression as those who could not eliminate it. Doctors had viewed poor sleep as a result of depression, but now we know that the relationship is much more complex. Lack of sleep can precede and may even cause some depression—not just the other way around. So getting enough, or even extra sleep, during the holidays is an important goal.

Another recommendation for improving mood and reducing depression and stress, while simultaneously providing benefits for our waistlines, is exercise. Results from numerous studies have shown that physical activity does more than improve our cardiovascular systems. Researchers from the University of Toronto looked at 30 well-designed research studies published over the last 26 years and consistently found that even moderate activity, such as walking for 20 to 30 minutes daily, can not only treat but also prevent depression in people of all ages. Most people who have developed the habit of exercise will attest that it is not just the physical benefits that keep them committed, but also how it makes them feel mentally.

Just a short 20-minute walk is a good way to start. Most stress reduction plans also include making time for yourself. So a walk, alone or with a good friend, not only provides exercise, but it can also help you take time out, clear your mind and promote an inner calm. Start now, you don't have to wait to make it a New Year's resolution.

If you are feeling isolated or lonely, you may want to seek out community, religious or other social events. Above all, if nothing seems to help and you are still feeling down, seek professional help. We are fortunate to have many resources in our county. The confidential, 24-hour, 7-days-a-week, Putnam County Mental Health Crisis Line is 845-225-1222.