

ASK AHSC

ANSWERS TO HEALTH QUESTIONS

From The University of Arizona Health Sciences Center (AHSC) in Tucson

Q How can I cope during the holidays following a death in the family?

A If there has been a death in the family – or there is serious illness or concerns about aging — the holidays can magnify feelings of loss, isolation, anger, guilt and loneliness instead of being a time for remembering important and happy occasions and for looking forward to the future.

Planning ahead can help you — and others — get through these times. Remember that anticipating a holiday is much worse than the holiday itself.

Start by getting together with your family and deciding what each member wants to do for the holidays and what each can handle comfortably. Then let others know the role you and your family will play during the holidays. Realize that it isn't going to be easy; just do the best you can.

Cut back on holiday cards, if you wish; contacts can be made throughout the coming year.

Have someone else shop for gifts, or postpone gift-giving altogether. On-line buying may be an alternative to facing the crowds if you still want to participate in gift-giving.

Decorate only to the extent to which you are comfortable.

Let someone else cook the main holiday meal, or change the time of day when it was traditionally served.

If you live alone, invite someone over for a meal, volunteer to serve meals to others, go to a movie, or select a special book to start reading that day.

Be sure to take care of your needs; get adequate rest and exercise. Spend some time outdoors and pay attention to

the things around you; it will help bring some distraction and quiet some of those hurtful thoughts and feelings.

Acknowledge the absence of your loved one: have a dinner or toast in their honor, light a candle for them, or visit the cemetery or memorial site. Engage in spiritual activities that bring you comfort and solace.

All wounds take time to heal. You will feel sad at times. Crying won't ruin the day for others — it will provide them with the same freedom to cry.

Don't be afraid to cry. Don't feel guilty if something makes you smile or laugh. Enjoy the gifts found in special memories and in contact with family and friends.

—Julie Tackenberg, RN, clinical supervisor, Home Health, University Medical Center, Tucson

