

**MedicineNet Health Research Survey Report**

**Dealing with Winter Holiday Depression and  
Stress**  
Survey Results



Prepared by MedicineNet, Inc.  
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[http://www.medicinenet.com/holiday\\_depression\\_survey/article.htm](http://www.medicinenet.com/holiday_depression_survey/article.htm)



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## Health Research Survey Reports

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## Executive Summary

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For most people the holiday season is a time of family gatherings, parties and bonhomie. However, for many, this supposedly happy season brings sadness, depression and a profound sense of loneliness. Drinking and eating too much and getting too little rest compound the problem. The phenomenon of holiday depression is well-documented. A number of national mental health associations, such as National Mental Health Association and the American Association for Geriatric Psychiatry, and health web sites including MedicineNet provide information on coping with holiday stress and depression. Most of the advice focuses on setting realistic expectations and improving time-management tactics.

This survey, triggered by searches for information on depression, represents the responses of a Web-savvy audience more interested in depression and stress than the public at large.

This survey plumbs the following:

- The prevalence of depression and stress and what proportion of depressed individuals receive medical treatment for their depression
- How individuals subject to depression and stress reduce their holiday depression and stress
- How extensively the internet is used to combat depression and reduce stress

This survey was conducted during the timeframe of October 13, 2004 and October 22, 2004. The data reflects the opinions of a self-identified panel of 961 individuals visiting MedicineNet.com who indicated that they suffered from depression or felt burdened by the demands and pressures on them.

The relationship between holiday depression and stress, often cited in the literature, was once again confirmed by the responses to this survey. As reported, the prevalence of depression increases as the prevalence of stress increases (defined as demands and pressures). However, it is interesting to note that even those individuals reporting that they are never depressed still reported episodes of stress.

The data shows that spending time on the computer (18%) was chosen as a strategy for coping with holiday depression more often than telephoning friends (13%). However, online forums and chat rooms are used by just 4% of survey respondents to cope with holiday depression. Although 18% of the survey population spends more time on the computer to cope with depression, the results showed that they do not shop more online to save time and reduce stress. They prefer more traditional means of stress relief – spending time by themselves, prayer and exercise. The survey confirms that the holidays are a time of increased depression and stress, and that those who believe they are depressed feel the impact more heavily.

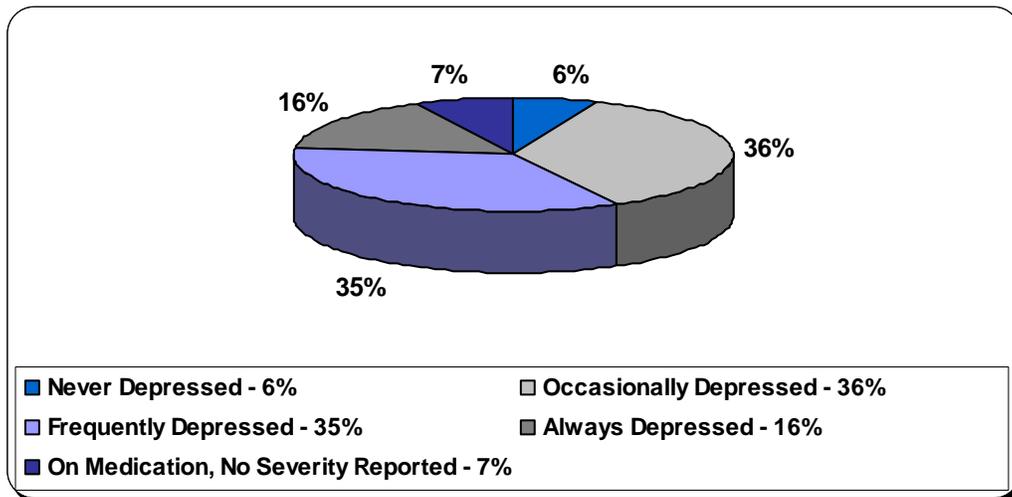
## Methodology

MedicineNet.com used a five-question pop-up online survey to query 961 individuals responding to the question: “Do you suffer from depression or feel burdened by the demands and pressures on you?” All were visitors to the depression content of the MedicineNet.com site. All responses were completely anonymous, and no visitor received the survey more than once, so the aggregated results represent unique individual respondents.

### THE SURVEY POPULATION

Of the survey respondents 94% indicated that they suffer from episodes of depression. Their self-reported frequency of depression subjectively measured the severity of their depression. Thus, of the depressed respondents, 36% were occasionally depressed; 35% were frequently depressed; 16% were always depressed, and 6% were on medication for depression but gave no indication of the frequency of their episodes (See *Figure 1: Frequency of Depression in Survey Respondents*).

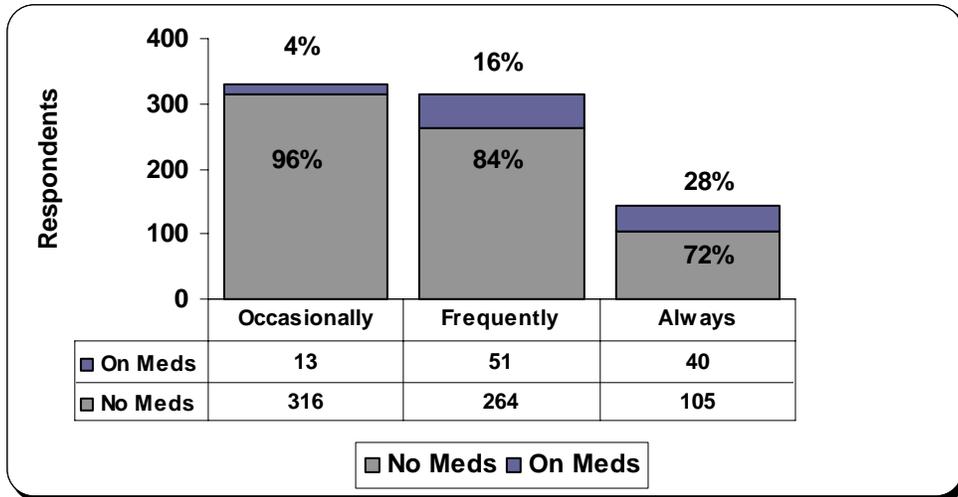
Figure 1: Frequency of Depression in Survey Respondents  
n=911



Respondents were also asked to indicate whether they were taking medication for depression to assess how many of them had sought professional help and were presently being treated with medication. Not surprisingly, increasing frequency of depression (i.e.,

increasing severity of depression) was associated with increasing use of medication. Use of medication increased from 4% of respondents with occasional depression to 28% of respondents who were always depressed. Nevertheless, even among respondents who were always depressed, only 28% used medication (See *Figure 2: Depressed Survey Respondents Taking Medication for Depression*).

**Figure 2: Depressed Survey Respondents Taking Medication for Depression  
n=789**



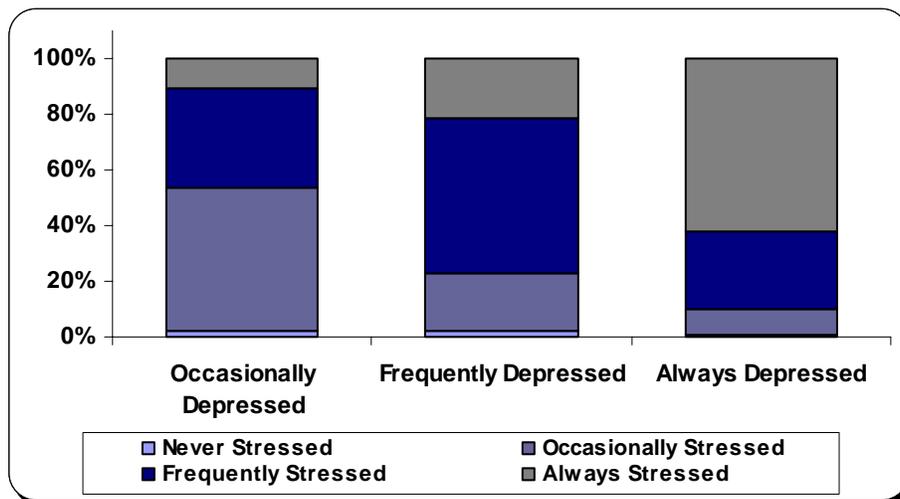
## Findings

To develop a clear picture of winter holiday depression and how individuals cope with depression, it was necessary to look at the impact of stress, since the holidays with their added demands and pressures increase stress levels. The findings indicate that depression and stress symptoms increase during the holidays, and that people use a variety of methods for coping with depression and stress.

### STRESS

Of the respondents who were depressed, 98% indicated that they also felt stress, demonstrating a strong association between depression and stress. Increasing frequency of depression was associated with increasing frequency of stress. Thus, the frequency of frequent or constant stress increased from 46% among respondents who were occasionally depressed to 88% among respondents who were always depressed (See *Figure 3: Levels of Stress among Depressed Survey Respondents* and *Table 1: Levels of Stress among Depressed Survey Respondents*). This observation further strengthens the observed association between depression and stress.

**Figure 3: Levels of Stress among Depressed Survey Respondents**  
n=785



**Table 1: Levels of Stress among Depressed Survey Respondents  
n=785**

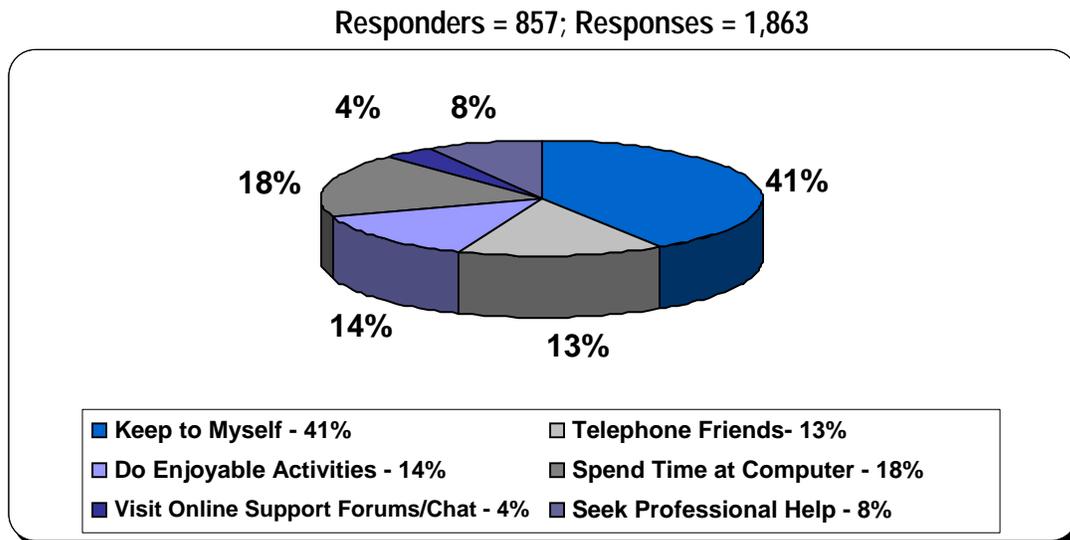
|                              | Occasionally Depressed |      | Frequently Depressed |      | Always Depressed |      |
|------------------------------|------------------------|------|----------------------|------|------------------|------|
| <b>Never Stressed</b>        | 6                      | 2%   | 7                    | 2%   | 1                | 1%   |
| <b>Occasionally Stressed</b> | 171                    | 52%  | 65                   | 21%  | 13               | 9%   |
| <b>Frequently Stressed</b>   | 116                    | 35%  | 174                  | 56%  | 41               | 28%  |
| <b>Always Stressed</b>       | 36                     | 11%  | 66                   | 21%  | 89               | 62%  |
| <b>Total</b>                 | 329                    | 100% | 312                  | 100% | 144              | 100% |

## COPING WITH HOLIDAY DEPRESSION

For many individuals a happy holiday season is the result of successfully coping with holiday depression. The survey plumbed whether computer-savvy individuals, such as those taking the survey, use their computers to help them cope with holiday depression or turn to more traditional coping methods, such as phoning friends and doing activities they enjoy.

The survey also queried whether individuals sought to work out their problems by themselves or sought professional help from mental health professionals. As *Figure 6: Methods Used for Coping with Holiday Depression* shows, most individuals prefer to solve their problems alone. Spending more time at the computer (18%) was chosen as a coping strategy more often than telephoning friends (13%). Only 4% of survey respondents indicated that they turn to online forums and chat rooms for support, and 8% seek professional help.

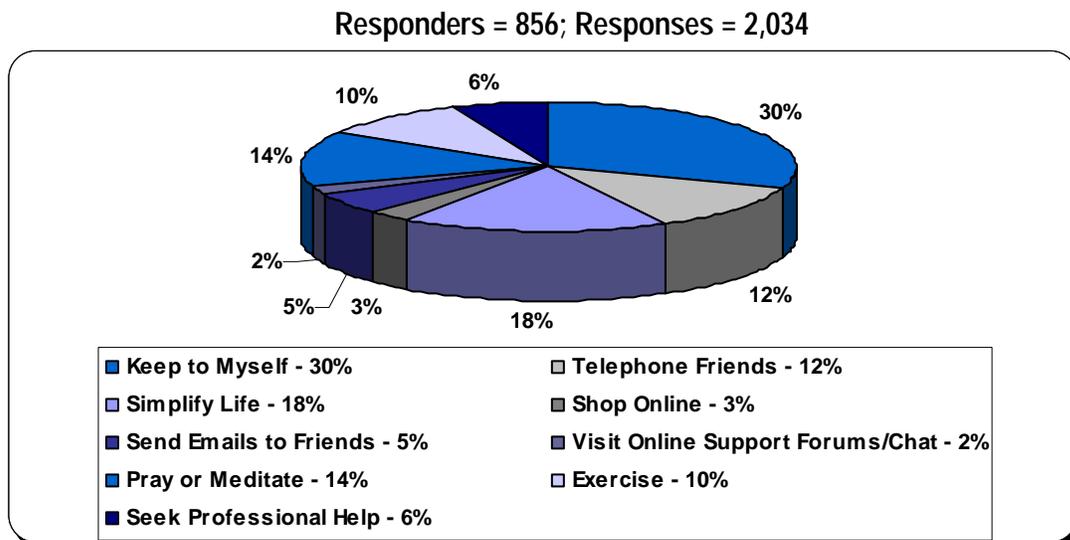
**Figure 6: Methods Used for Coping with Holiday Depression**  
*Percent of total responses*



## COPING WITH HOLIDAY STRESS

The added activities of the holiday season increase demands and pressures on everyone. This survey examined the methods used by Web-savvy individuals for coping with holiday stress. The survey probed whether they shop online to save time, visit online forums and chat rooms, email friends to stay in touch or turn to the telephone. Do they seek other means to make life simpler? The survey also asked participants to indicate if they use prayer/meditation, exercise, time to themselves, or the support of mental health professionals to help reduce their stress. As *Figure 7: Methods Used for Coping with Holiday Stress* shows, survey respondents do not use their computers to help them cope with holiday stress and prefer more traditional methods. Emailing friends does not appear to be a significant method of easing stress for survey respondents. Survey respondents do not frequently seek the solace of online forums and chat rooms but prefer keeping to themselves and simplifying their lives.

**Figure 7: Methods Used for Coping with Holiday Stress**  
Percent of total responses



## Conclusions

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The following conclusions can be drawn from this survey:

- 94% of survey respondents indicated that they suffer from episodes of depression; however, some (18%) seek professional help and medication for managing their depression.
- Stress is more pervasive than depression, for 97% of all survey respondents indicated feeling stressed, and 100% of patients on medication for depression indicated feeling some level of stress.
- Survey participants reporting greater severity of depression also reported feeling burdened by demands and pressures (stress) more frequently.
- Spending more time at the computer (18%) was chosen as a strategy for coping with holiday depression more often than telephoning friends (13%).
- 4% of survey respondents indicated that they turn to online forums and chat rooms for support, and 8% seek professional help for holiday depression.
- Survey respondents do not use the computers to help them cope with holiday stress and prefer more traditional methods. Emailing friends does not appear to be a significant method of easing stress or survey respondents. Survey respondents do not frequently seek the solace of online forums and chat rooms.

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## MedicineNet.com – Additional Resources

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Below are links to additional information available on MedicineNet.com.

The doctor-produced articles on MedicineNet are:

- **Reliable and objective** -- each article is written, edited, and reviewed by more than one U.S. Board Certified doctor.
- **User-friendly** -- articles are written by doctors in easy-to-understand language.
- **Comprehensive** -- doctors not only present scientific knowledge, they also explain how they make treatment and diagnostic decisions.
- **Relevant** -- doctors select articles and news items that are clinically relevant.

### MedicineNet.com's Depression Overview

<http://www.medicinenet.com/depression/focus.htm>

### Depression Main Article

<http://www.medicinenet.com/depression/article.htm>

### Stress Main Article

<http://www.medicinenet.com/stress/article.htm>

### Holiday Depression and Stress Article

[http://www.medicinenet.com/holiday\\_depression\\_and\\_stress/article.htm](http://www.medicinenet.com/holiday_depression_and_stress/article.htm)

### MedicineNet Home Page

<http://www.medicinenet.com>

### Diseases and Conditions

[http://www.medicinenet.com/diseases\\_and\\_conditions/article.htm](http://www.medicinenet.com/diseases_and_conditions/article.htm)

### Symptoms and Signs

[http://www.medicinenet.com/symptoms\\_and\\_signs/article.htm](http://www.medicinenet.com/symptoms_and_signs/article.htm)

### Procedures and Tests

[http://www.medicinenet.com/procedures\\_and\\_tests/article.htm](http://www.medicinenet.com/procedures_and_tests/article.htm)

### Medications (non-prescription and prescription drugs)

<http://www.medicinenet.com/medications/article.htm>

### MedTerms™ Online Medical Dictionary

<http://www.medterms.com>

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