

# Independence Center Offers Mental Health Tips Over The Holidays

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ST. LOUIS - The holiday season can be an exciting time of year for many people, but for those battling a mental illness, it can also lead to an increase in symptoms. Independence Center, a local nonprofit dedicated to helping adults struggling with mental illness, wants to remind people of some simple tips to avoid holiday-related anxiety or depression.

“There’s a variety of reasons the holidays can be tough for people struggling with a mental illness,” said Business Development Manager Abby Berger. “Those can range

from past memories of substance abuse, financial restrictions, or dealing with difficult family members and friends that you only see around the holidays. It's important to think about what causes you anxiety or stress and remember that you have a choice about how you move forward. Put yourself and your mental health ahead of other people's expectations and limit your time at places that you know might trigger symptoms."

Berger said the change in routines and eating habits over the holidays can also trigger symptoms. She recommends avoiding excessive amounts of fatty food or alcohol, and paying attention to how alcohol might interact with other medications you are taking. Lack of exercise or sleep can cause changes in hormone levels which can lead to increased feelings of depression or anxiety. Berger said it's okay to enjoy the season and celebrate, but try to make sure you are paying attention to how your body and mind feel.

"Don't put unnecessary stress on yourself over the holidays," said Berger. "Pay attention to when you are starting to feel anxiety or depression and try to remove yourself from situations that increase that feeling. Find a way to relax if needed and remember that there are local resources, like Independence Center, available if you need help."

Independence Center's mission is to provide all the services and resources a person with a serious and persistent mental illness needs to manage their symptoms, find belonging and purpose and gain the independence to live a healthy, quality life. For more information about Independence Center, or to learn more about their services, go to [www.independencecenter.org](http://www.independencecenter.org) or call (314) 533-4245. You can also reach Independence Center's After Hours Crisis Hotline at (314) 469-0620.