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BEAT THE HOLIDAY BLUES

Occupational Therapy Practitioners Offer Tips for Reducing Holiday-Related Stress, Depression

Bethesda, MD — Although the holidays are expected to be a time of joy and family get-togethers, the gap between a person's expectations and the reality of the experience can be disappointing and sometimes even painful. However, occupational therapy practitioners – who are skilled in helping people deal with stress, depression and other emotional issues – can offer tips for beating the holiday blues.

According to the **American Occupational Therapy Association's** (AOTA) **societal statement on stress and stress disorders**, occupational therapy “promotes the establishment of healthy habit patterns; familiar, predictable routines; and increased engagement in meaningful occupations that serve both as protective and healing factors in combating the negative effects of stress.”

“To ensure that your holidays are pleasurable, it's important to evaluate how you spend your time and have realistic expectations,” said Laurel Cargill Radley, MS, OTR, associate director of professional affairs at AOTA.

Specifically, AOTA suggests the following:

- **Curb spending.** The holidays prompt people to spend more than they can afford. Make a holiday budget that includes the cost of extra meals, postage for mailing gifts and tickets to special events. Look for ways to keep the spirit and cut the cost.
- **Engage only in those activities that have true meaning and perpetuate happiness**, and consider forgoing those that are stress-inducing or do not bring happiness.
- **Baking, scrapbooking and other activities requiring hand movements** may help prevent the onset of depression and other emotional disorders, according to research.
- **Share the burden.** Ask family members and friends for help when preparing meals, buying gifts or entertaining.
- **Maintain healthy habits and routines.** Eat right, exercise and get enough sleep. Be careful not to indulge on high-sugar foods at parties or consume too much alcohol.
- **Recognize signs of stress and practice stress management strategies.** When you begin to get frustrated, take a few deep breaths, take a break or use relaxation techniques, including guided imagery and progressive muscle relaxation. Additionally, research has shown that stress management programs and creative activity programs can significantly reduce stress.
- **Practice patience.** The holidays are not likely to change the attitudes of relatives and friends who may be critical from time to time. Acknowledge these behaviors and plan how you will respond.
- **Laugh.** Research indicates using humor can help one cope with stress, pain or sadness.

Founded in 1917, the **American Occupational Therapy Association** (AOTA) represents the interests and concerns of more than 140,000 occupational therapists, assistants and students nationwide. The Association educates the public and advances the profession of occupational therapy by providing resources, setting standards including accreditations and serving as an advocate to improve health care. Based in Bethesda, Md., AOTA's major programs and activities are directed toward promoting the professional development of its members and assuring consumer access to quality services so patients can maximize their individual potential. For more information, go to www.aota.org.