Have things been moving a bit slower at the office since the end of the holiday break? Is it a little harder to get employees motivated in the early days of the new year? Don't worry; you're not the only one tackling the post-holiday blues.

The letdown in energy following the holiday season has many names: post holiday blues, Boxing Day blues (in England), or post holiday tension — whatever the name, it's common for workers to feel a letdown after the energy and excitement that naturally come with the holidays. Getting back to the 8-5 grind with no big events on the near horizon can be daunting for anyone.

"It's normal for people to fall into somewhat of a funk following the holidays," says Bert Alicea, vice president of EAP and Work/Life Services at Health Advocate, an employee assistance program based in Plymouth Meeting, Pennsylvania. "They anticipated the holidays for weeks, so returning to work is difficult, especially if they don't have another break for months." Alicea estimated it takes two weeks or so for people to start returning to their normal routines.

Alicea says that the busy holiday season leads some to put off priorities such as finances or health care appointments, leading to more stress once the new year begins. "People have a tendency to put their life on hold over the holidays," he says. "But then reality begins to set in, in a wide variety of different ways, after the new year."

Tips for getting back on track
With the post holiday letdown such a universal — and usually temporary — conditions, experts say little things can go a long way to easing the transition. Kennedy says employees should make the most of what time off they do have.

"Take advantage of your lunch hour to go to yoga class or reconnect with your co-workers," he says. "Don't sit at your desk. Walk around; go have lunch with somebody."

He adds that simply putting one’s nose to the grindstone can be counterproductive.

"Sometimes people feel behind at this time of year; they kind of jump back in a full speed," he says. "You are dealing with the added pressure of returning to [work]. Take a week or two back to ease into your routine."
Alicea says that group activities for workers, or some sort of recognition for a job well done, can be beneficial and help lift employees’ mood. Reminding them that they don’t have to try to do it all can help, as well, he says.

“Encourage employees to focus more on smaller tasks to reduce stress,” he says. “With this being the flu season, a lot of people come in to work when they’re sick. I would encourage employees to stay home when they’re sick, to avoid spreading the illness among other team workers.”

Kennedy adds that it’s important to recognize that the holidays often lead to excess.

“In general, a lot of us get off track in terms of eating, or exercise, or sleep,” he says.

“We get off our diets. I think one of the first things to do is focus on basic self care and get back to the things you know will make you feel better. Get back to sleeping your regular hours. Give yourself a little detox time from alcohol.”

**Resolve to skip resolutions?**

The traditional new year’s resolutions can add pressure for some, but Kennedy says they work for others.

“It’s a mixed bag — for some people it helps to reset and have some measurable goals to stick to, but for others it’s overwhelming and just adds more to their to-do list.”

He says a more realistic approach is setting some short-term goals, such as ramping back into more-healthy eating and exercise habits.

“You resolve to get back on track, as opposed to making huge changes,” he says.

A group approach to new year’s resolutions can also be a positive step, when there is built-in support for the effort, Kennedy says. Company wellness programs often offer these types of goals.

According to Betsy Klein, vice president of New Directions Behavioral Health, employers can help workers with new year’s resolutions by having support programs such as financial seminars, wellness programs, or employee assistance programs to help with work/life issues.

“Whether they seek improved health, a stronger financial position or a renewed marital relationship, employers can help their employees thrive, resulting in a more satisfied and productive workplace,” she says.

**When the blues outlast the holidays**

Both Kennedy and Alicea say it’s important to watch for cases where employees do not get back to normal after the first few weeks. Alicea says that when workers are uncharacteristically moody, or lethargic, after the first two weeks back on the job, there might be a more serious issue — or one that requires additional support.

“EAPs can help employee tackle some of these issues,” he says. “Sometimes they might just need a coach to establish a plan to get back on track.”

Kennedy says he tells his clients to watch for different levels of post-holiday blues. A little grumpiness or lack of motivation is normal, he says.

“But if you find yourself in something that feels more severe and it’s impacting your ability to get to work on time, or to meet deadlines, and it goes on for more than two weeks, then you might want to consult with your EAP, or talk to somebody,” he says. “Because you might be experiencing something more serious.”