

Many people mistakenly believe that grief is a single emotion, but normal grief is actually a powerful, multifaceted and often uncontrollable response that we experience following a personally painful or traumatic event, such as the death of a loved one. In other words, grief can affect us not only emotionally but also physically, mentally and even spiritually.

The loss of a loved one due to death plunges us unwillingly into a maelstrom of pain that often feels overwhelming and inescapable. Common physical grief responses can include any of the following, individually or concurrently:

APPETITE CHANGES OR DIGESTIVE ISSUES, ENERGY LOSS, INABILITY TO FOCUS, FORGETFULNESS, HEADACHES, NERVOUSNESS, SLEEPING TOO LITTLE OR SLEEPING TOO MUCH, WEIGHT GAIN OR WEIGHT LOSS

Illness: The stress of losing a loved and the subsequent grief can reduce or suppress your immune system, making you more susceptible to coming down with a cold or catching the flu. In addition, those with an existing chronic health condition might experience a worsening of their symptoms. When grieving a death, some mourners have also reported experiencing dry mouth, noise sensitivity, trembling or feeling shaky, tightness in the throat or chest, shortness of breath, and increased allergy symptoms.

Unfortunately, there is no method to eliminate or avoid the physical affects you might experience after a loss. While difficult and often painful, grief is a normal and necessary response to the death of a loved one, and most people will see a reduction of grief-induced physical effects with the passage of time.

If any of the physical effects you're experiencing do not subside in time or feel unbearable, you should consult your physician or healthcare provider. This is particularly the case for pain or physical discomfort, digestive problems, illness or flu, or if an existing chronic health issue worsens.

In addition, the most important way you can help yourself while grieving is to take care of yourself and your needs. Many of the physical effects of grief listed above arise from the failure to listen to our bodies and practice the healthy habits we otherwise might. Here are a few important ways grievers can care for themselves:

STAY HYDRATED: Drink plenty of water throughout the day and avoid excessive alcohol consumption, which acts as a diuretic and can actually dehydrate your body.

GET EXERCISE: If you regularly exercised before the death of your loved one, then try to continue that routine as much as possible. And if you led a sedentary lifestyle, then consider finding some time to exercise each day, such as riding your bike or asking a friend to stroll with you in the local park or shopping mall. Even moderate daily exercise can help you sleep better; working out some muscle stiffness or discomfort and can often lift your spirits and improve your outlook.

EAT PROPERLY: As noted above, grievers often find it difficult to have a meal even if they feel like eating. At times like this, consider eating several smaller meals during the day if your schedule interferes with your usual breakfast, lunch and dinner routine. In addition, the foods you consume should consist of healthy, nourishing items rather than fast food. If you lack the time or energy to shop for groceries, consider asking a loved one to visit the market for you.

GET REST: While grief typically disrupts our normal sleep patterns, getting proper rest is important. To whatever extent possible, try to develop a regular bedtime routine and schedule; minimize distractions, such as a television or cell phone; and keep your bedroom dark. In addition, try to avoid caffeinated drinks for at least three hours before bedtime.