

CARING FOR YOURSELF IN GRIEF

Sleep. Regular rest is very important. If you have trouble sleeping, try drinking a glass of milk or listening to soothing music. Sometimes journaling can help to transfer racing thoughts from the head to paper. Find what works for you. If you are unable to sleep well for a significant period of time, talk to a physician who understands how grief affects the body. Help sleeping is essential to being present enough to think and feel and handle challenges that may come up.

Eat Well. Try to eat well-balanced meals. Seek out people with whom you will be comfortable to share mealtimes. Eat meals intentionally; do not rely on snacks or simply eating in front of the television. Gradually your appetite will return but good food can be calming and helps us maintain a base level of health when stressed.

Drink Well. Drink plenty of water and herbal teas. Caffeinated drinks can affect moods and change your perception of stress as well as the stress itself. Alcohol may temporarily enhance moods but is a central nervous depressant and can contribute to depression that may not be directly from grieving your loss.

Exercise. Get *some* exercise, whether walking, T'ai chi, swimming, or any physical activity. If your regular exercise routine works, continue it. If it doesn't, just get some movement in. Moving helps release tension and keeps the body energized. It is also one of the most effective defenses against depression.

Breathe. Take "time-outs" and breathe deeply and fully two to three times in the midst of your activities or whenever you realize that you are holding your breath or breathing shallowly. It's usually possible to excuse yourself from an activity for two minutes to calm your breathing. Sometimes that's all it takes.

Seek And Allow Support. We do not grieve well alone. Find people who are comfortable with your grief and will let you experience your feelings, whether that is crying, telling your story again and again, or sitting with you in silence.

Be Patient. Try to be patient with people who do not understand your pain or process. Be patient with yourself as well. Grief takes time and is often hard to recognize or accept.

Find Expressions For Your Loss. Find an outlet for your thoughts and feelings. Journaling is a good way to externalize all that is going on inside of you. Some people find creative outlets, such as painting, sculpting, or writing and playing music. Others may just find talking to be the best outlet.

Allow Yourself Time to Grieve. Allow yourself grieving times. Try to declare other times non-grieving times. Sometimes it is inevitable that you will experience unexpected moments of grief. But you can also allow yourself grieving times and try to declare other times 'off-limits' (like at work). Just be compassionate when your plans to manage grief don't work.

Pamper Yourself. Set aside times each day to do one activity that brings you comfort and feels like you are pampering yourself. Even if it does not bring the pleasure it used to bring, it will help you relax and strengthen your awareness that you *do* have some choices in your process.

Physical Contact. Learn to ask for hugs when you want them. Get a massage or bodywork if it feels comforting. Remember that the desire for physical contact may change every day or at any moment, so learn how to say no when it doesn't feel good to you.

Look to Nature or Animals. Nature and pets can be healing and calming and bring lightness and humor into our worlds. Tune into the cycles of nature. Absorb the beauty and wonder of the natural world.

Find Your Personal Coping Skills. Draw on your memory of past experiences that were difficult. What you learned then may help you now. Learn what you can do when emotions or thoughts overwhelm you. The stronger your coping skills, the less you will feel helplessness.

Include Your Medical Team In Helping You. While grief is not a medical condition, it can take its toll of your body. You may be exhausted and stressed enough to be susceptible to illness or to develop a sleep disorder. Dehydration and poor eating habits, or isolation can affect your ability to get through a day or face long-term challenges. Let your primary care practitioner know that you have faced a major loss, whether you need to see them or now.

Be Gentle with Yourself. Above all, be gentle with yourself. If one of your friends needed help and support with grief, what would you do for them?