

Caring for Your Mind and Body While Grieving

Emotional and physical effects of grief

Grief is not only an emotion. It can affect sleep, appetite, energy, concentration, relationships, anxiety levels and the way the body feels. There is no single pattern and no correct timetable. This guide explores one part of that mind-body experience and offers practical, gentle ways to respond.

There is no perfect self-care routine

Self-care during grief is not a project to perform well. Some days care may mean getting dressed; on another it may mean cancelling something and resting. The goal is support, not achievement.

What may help: reduce unnecessary demands, use familiar routines where they are comforting, write down what you need to remember, and let trusted people help with practical tasks. Notice what genuinely settles or supports you rather than what you think you should be doing.

Rest, food and hydration

Basic needs can become easy to miss. Visual reminders, drinks kept nearby, simple foods and accepting practical help can reduce the number of decisions required.

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Movement and fresh air

Movement can help release tension and provide a change of environment, but it should match your capacity. A short walk, stretching by a window or sitting outside can count.

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Connection and asking for practical help

Specific requests are often easier for others to respond to: 'Could you bring dinner?', 'Can you sit with me while I make this call?' or 'Could you walk the dog?' Practical support can preserve energy for grief itself.

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Making space for emotion

There is no requirement to talk constantly. Writing, music, photographs, ritual, silence, prayer, creativity or speaking the person's name can all create space for grief. Choose what fits you.

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Professional and bereavement support

Not everybody needs counselling. If you want additional support, bereavement services, person-centred counselling, your GP and NHS mental health services can help. If grief remains intensely disabling for many months or years, ask a GP about prolonged grief and available treatment.

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A Message From Me

Grief can be emotional and physical at the same time. Please do not judge yourself for finding ordinary things harder. Your mind and body may both be adapting to a profound change. Take the next manageable step, accept support where it helps, and have persistent or worrying physical symptoms checked rather than assuming everything is grief.

Books you may find helpful

- Grief Works - Julia Samuel
- It's OK That You're Not OK - Megan Devine
- The Grieving Brain - Mary-Frances O'Connor
- The Plain Guide to Grief - John Wilson

Support and when to seek more help

Cruse Bereavement Support offers bereavement information and support. The NHS provides guidance on grief, bereavement, loss and prolonged grief disorder. Speak with your GP if physical symptoms are persistent or concerning, or if grief is substantially affecting your ability to function. If you are in immediate danger or need urgent mental health help, use urgent NHS services; Samaritans can also be contacted on 116 123.

With warmth,

Maggie

Space to Breathe Therapy • Support Hub