

How Grief Affects Sleep, Energy and Concentration

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.

Why grief is exhausting

Grieving uses emotional and cognitive energy. Practical changes, disrupted routines, paperwork, caring responsibilities and constant remembering can add to that load. Fatigue is not laziness; it can be part of the body's response to sustained stress and loss.

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.

Sleep changes and vivid dreams

Sleep may become lighter, broken or difficult to begin. Some people sleep much more. Dreams can feel vivid and waking can briefly recreate the shock of the loss. A gentle evening routine and reduced pressure to 'sleep perfectly' can be more realistic than forcing a rigid routine.

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Brain fog and forgetfulness

People commonly describe losing words, forgetting appointments, rereading the same paragraph or walking into a room and forgetting why. Keeping short lists, using reminders and reducing unnecessary decisions can provide temporary scaffolding while concentration is reduced.

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Concentration and decision-making

Even simple choices can feel unusually demanding. Where possible, postpone major decisions that do not need to be made immediately, break tasks into smaller steps and ask another trusted person to sit alongside you for complicated practical work.

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Working while grieving

Returning to work can provide structure for some people and feel unbearable for others. Temporary adjustments, quieter tasks, additional breaks or reduced expectations may help. Grief can fluctuate, so a

plan that works one week may need changing the next.

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Gentle ways to support your energy

Aim for manageable basics rather than an ambitious wellness plan: regular drinks, simple food, daylight, brief movement, rest and one or two priorities. Recovery of energy is rarely linear.

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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

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