

My Body Is Grieving Too

Grief is emotional, but it can also be intensely physical. This guide gives you space to notice what your body is carrying without judging or dismissing it.

A grieving body may feel exhausted, tense, restless, heavy, shaky, numb or unusually sensitive. Sleep, appetite, digestion, concentration and energy can change. These experiences are real. They do not mean you are grieving incorrectly, and you do not have to force your body back to normal on somebody else's timetable.

What my body is telling me today

The sensation or change I notice most

When I seem to notice it most

I NEED TO SCREAM — MY WHOLE BODY HURTS WITH THIS

This page does not need calm language, gratitude or perspective. Let your body have a voice.

Write hard. Scribble. Use capitals. Repeat yourself. Leave gaps. Draw lines or shapes. Your words do not need to be reasonable or tidy.

I am tired of...

This hurts...

My body needs...

What I really want to scream from my body is...

Where Grief Sits in My Body

There is no single body map for grief. Notice your own pattern rather than trying to match somebody else's.

You might notice pressure in the chest, a lump or tightness in the throat, a clenched jaw, headaches, aching shoulders, stomach changes, weakness in the legs, trembling, restlessness, heaviness or a sense of numbness. You may notice something completely different.

Where I feel grief today — chest, throat, jaw, stomach, head, shoulders, limbs, skin or somewhere else

If the sensation had words, texture, temperature, movement or colour, it would be...

What changes when a grief wave grows stronger

Sleep, Fatigue and the Exhaustion of Grief

Grief can be tiring even when you have done very little. Emotional processing, disrupted routines and heightened stress can all affect rest.

Some people struggle to fall asleep; others wake repeatedly, dream vividly, sleep for longer, or wake feeling as though they have not rested. Fatigue can arrive suddenly. Rather than treating tiredness as laziness, notice what your current capacity actually is.

My nights have been like...

My mornings / energy during the day feel like...

What might make rest easier or reduce one demand

Appetite, Stomach and Nourishment

Grief can affect hunger, taste, digestion and the ability to plan or prepare food. The aim here is noticing, not judging.

You may forget meals, feel nauseous, lose interest in food, eat for comfort, feel stomach tension or find familiar foods easier. On difficult days, “good enough” nourishment may be more realistic than an ideal routine. If eating or drinking becomes difficult or concerning, seek appropriate health support.

What I have noticed about hunger, appetite or digestion

Foods, drinks, routines or practical help that make nourishment easier

What I need others NOT to pressure me about

Tension, Restlessness and Sensory Overload

A grieving nervous system may have less spare capacity for noise, light, touch, conversation, crowds or constant demands.

Notice whether you are clenching your jaw, holding your breath, pacing, fidgeting, bracing your shoulders, becoming more startled, or needing more quiet than usual. Reducing stimulation is not avoidance when your system genuinely needs a lower load.

The physical tension or restlessness I notice

Noise, light, touch, people or situations that feel harder at the moment

What helps my body feel less overloaded

When a Grief Wave Hits the Body

Sometimes the body reacts before the mind has caught up. A smell, place, date, sound, message or ordinary moment can bring a sudden physical wave.

Your first sign might be a change in breathing, tears, nausea, heat, cold, shaking, heaviness, chest pressure or an urge to escape. Learning your early signs is not about preventing grief; it can help you meet the wave with more choice and less fear.

The first physical sign that a wave is arriving

Triggers or moments my body seems to remember

What helps me stay with the wave safely until it changes

Supporting My Body Without Trying to Erase My Grief

Care is not the same as fixing. You can support your body while still allowing the grief to exist.

Small supports might include water, something manageable to eat, warmth or cool air, a shower, comfortable clothing, gentle movement, lying down, reduced noise, fresh air, familiar routines, prescribed medication taken as directed, or asking somebody to stay nearby. Choose what fits you.

My body needs MORE of...

My body needs LESS of...

My small body-support plan for a difficult grief day

When I Need Extra Support

Physical grief is real, but not every physical symptom should automatically be assumed to be grief.

If a symptom is new, severe, persistent, worsening or worrying you, speak with an appropriate healthcare professional. Seek urgent medical help for symptoms that may represent an emergency. You deserve to have physical concerns taken seriously even while you are grieving.

Symptoms or changes I want to discuss with a GP or health professional

What I want the professional to understand about my grief

Practical or emotional support I need from other people

Your Body Does Not Have to Grieve Quietly

There is no prize for carrying physical grief without rest, support or acknowledgement.

A message from Maggie

Grief can change how you sleep, eat, move, breathe, concentrate and tolerate the world around you. Please do not use those changes as evidence that you are weak or failing. Your body may be doing an enormous amount of work while you are simply trying to get through an ordinary day. Listen to what it is asking for where you can. Rest when rest is needed. Reduce demands when they can be reduced. Let somebody help. And if something physical worries you, you are allowed to ask for medical support rather than assuming you just have to put up with it because you are grieving.

What I most need to remember about my body and grief

One permission I can give my body today

Further reading and support: Megan Devine — It's OK That You're Not OK (2017). Julia Samuel — Grief Works (2017). Cruse Bereavement Support offers bereavement information and support. NHS information can also help when you are unsure whether physical symptoms need medical attention.

This resource is for reflection and support and does not replace medical assessment or emergency care.