

# Coping with grief: Getting through each day

***Looking after yourself at an early stage can help your symptoms to subside and helps prevent long-term damage to health and quality of life. Below are some suggestions that may help you.***

## **Be aware that your feelings may change**

You may have different feelings at different times. Your feelings may change suddenly and unexpectedly, which can be exhausting and stressful. It can also be very challenging, for example if you suddenly feel extremely bad in a public place or at work. It can help to let people around you know that your emotions may be unpredictable and to ask these people to be understanding and supportive.

*It can also help to remember that your welfare matters, and looking after yourself when you are experiencing a strong emotion, regardless of where or when that happens, is the most important thing you need to do. Take time out for yourself, rather than try to carry on. Putting energy into loving other people can also be positive. But think about your needs first.*

## **Be aware that energy levels may vary**

Sometimes you may not have enough physical energy to be as active as you would wish. Sometimes you may not have enough mental energy or find it very difficult to engage in a conversation or debate a point, which can be particularly frustrating if you are normally articulate, feel very strongly about something or need to say something. You may find this upsetting, particularly if you are normally an energetic person who multitasks and gets things done.

*Don't demand too much of yourself. Try to only do one thing at a time for now. If you feel you need to rest, then you should. If there is someone else who can do tasks for you, let them. Higher energy levels should return.*

## **Food**

Some people forget to eat properly or find eating difficult. But it is important to look after your own nutritional needs. Try to eat a little, often. You may find it helps to stock your fridge and cupboards with foods that are tasty, good for you and comforting but take little time to prepare, such as fruit juice, pots of yoghurt, crackers and carrot sticks.

*Unless you have specific dietary requirements, now is not a time to worry about calories. Eat what you want and when you want. If a cup of hot chocolate or a pudding is comforting to you, then eat it.*

## **Exercise**

You may not feel like exercising at all. However, gentle physical exercise, such as going for a short walk in a park, accompanied by someone who cares for you, may sometimes help more than staying in. Swimming, yoga, jogging or whatever sport you normally do may be relaxing for you and help you to think positive thoughts.

*Be aware that very energetic exercise can release chemicals into your system called endorphins that can trigger strong emotions, so you may want to consider avoiding such exercise for a while.*

## **Use of substances**

Some people are tempted to use alcohol, cigarettes or illegal drugs to help them temporarily feel more able to cope. However, it is not a good idea to use any substance, whether stimulant or tranquilliser, to manage your feelings. It is harder to identify and address feelings if they are masked by substance use, and the effects of substance use may be negative rather than positive.

*If you suffer from a substance abuse problem, then now is the time to seek treatment. Visit your doctor.*

## **Sleep**

It is common to struggle sleeping. Yet continuous lack of sleep is damaging to your health so it is important to try to get as much sleep as you can. If you find you are regularly awake most of the night then drop off from exhaustion as dawn approaches, try to arrange your life so you can have at least some lie-ins without disturbance. If you need to take time off work to catch up on sleep, then take it. An exhausted employee is not an effective employee.

*Your doctor may be able to prescribe medication to help you sleep but this is not recommended as a long term solution. Avoid caffeinated drinks after lunchtime, try moderate exercise so your body is tired, and at bedtime try relaxation techniques suggested.*

## **Knowing what happened**

If you are unsure about what happened when your loved one died, it may be better to know rather than imagine things that might not have happened. Police and medical personnel should be able to answer questions and you have a right to ask.

*If you don't feel able to ask, a family member or friend could ask on your behalf.*

## **Creative therapy to help you remember**

You may find it helps to express yourself and remember a person who has died in a creative way. For example, by making a memory box containing items that belonged to them, mounting photographs, painting a picture, writing down your memories, creating a song or a poem, or planting flowers or a tree. You will have your own idea, of meaning to you.

*Taking time out to do such things is not frivolous. It can be very helpful to your recovery and give you reassurance that someone's memory is being kept alive.*

## **Relaxation techniques**

Many bereaved people feel very tense. Breathing in and out deeply and slowly for a few minutes can be calming. This is something anyone can do anywhere – at work, on a bus, or in front of the TV. Therapies such as aromatherapy, massage, or running a deep, hot bubble bath can, for some people, help ease a small part of the tension.

*Sometimes you may just feel like sitting somewhere peaceful. Your recovery will take time and you need to make time for it.*

## **Enjoying activities and making plans**

Many people find long-standing hobbies, such as cooking, gardening, playing music, or looking after pets, are therapeutic for them. Some people find work is a stable and reassuring aspect of their life that gives them a sense of control and continuity. Make time for whatever helps you. Think about what the day might bring and avoid unnecessary activities that are likely to make you feel worse. For example, it may upset you to watch a movie or read a book featuring death. Or it may upset you to visit a public place with lots of people and noise. Or your job may be too demanding for you at this time and you may need to take time off. Try to plan things you can look forward to, such as seeing a friend.

*However, avoid making big or complex plans until you feel you can cope. It is easy to make wrong decisions under stress. For now, it may help to focus on just one thing at a time.*