

Physical effects of
grief

Large print version

Cruse
Bereavement
Support

Physical effects of grief

Grief affects the body in ways you might not expect. These changes can be worrying or even frightening.

Appetite and digestion

You may not feel like eating in the early days after someone dies. It may feel difficult to swallow and food can taste strange. Or you might find you're eating a lot more than usual, or only eating foods that you find comforting. Digestive upsets are also common.

This is very normal. Try not to be too hard on yourself if your diet looks different right now. And try not to panic if you notice these changes.

What helps?

Try to find what works for you. If you don't feel like eating, try serving yourself small, manageable portions. If you don't feel like cooking, try a ready-meal or something

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that takes little preparation. Go easy on yourself. It's okay if you're not eating as you normally would, but slowly getting back to a routine of eating at the same times can help.

If you're still worried after several weeks, speak to your GP.

Sleep

It's normal to have trouble sleeping after someone dies. You might be frightened to go to sleep because of bad dreams or nightmares. Or you might find it difficult to get to sleep because your mind is racing. Sometimes, you may dream that the person who died is still alive and find waking up to be very painful.

What helps?

- Try to slowly get back into a night-time routine.
- Things like taking a bath or showering before bed are good ways to help you relax into the evening.
- Exercise can also be really helpful to tire your body out.
- Walking and yoga are gentle ways to get moving if you don't feel up for energetic exercise.

- Try not getting into bed until you feel really ready to sleep.
- Try listening to relaxing music or sleep podcasts.

Anxiety

Grief can make you feel very anxious. Sometimes this can result in feeling breathless, having heart palpitations or even a panic attack. This can be very scary. If you start to have these regularly, it's a good idea to contact your doctor.

What helps?

- Exercise is a useful way for your body to reduce tension, and use up the adrenalin that it's producing that's making you feel anxious. But don't try and start an extreme new gym class when a gentle walk is all you can manage.
- Breathing exercises and meditation can be very helpful.
- Diet – some people find certain foods and drinks like coffee can make it worse, and some find it helps. Keeping a food diary could help work out what is affecting you.

- Talking to someone about what's making you anxious can also really help. Tell your friends, family and colleagues what's going on so they know how to support you. Or contact a support organisation such as Cruse.

Physical pain and other illness

It's common to feel physical pain, and have minor illnesses after someone dies. Grief can affect your whole body. It can make it harder for your body to fight off minor infections.

What helps?

Normally, feelings of physical pain will ease with time. But try to get as much rest as possible and listen to what your body needs.

Speak with your GP if you feel very unwell, or find you're still ill or in pain after several weeks.

For more support call our helpline

0808 808 1677

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