



A major or painful loss affects you emotionally and physically. It is important to care for your mind and your body after a loss. Try the following.

Feel your feelings. Try not to hide from feelings of grief, even if they are uncomfortable or frightening. Some people describe their experience as “riding a wave.” As the wave of feelings flows over you, lean into and ride it out. This will move the healing process along and help you avoid complications of grief, such as depression, substance abuse, and other health problems.

Write about your feelings. You might want to write your feelings down in a letter to your loved one or journal. It can help you focus on the good memories rather than the loss. You can write about daily experiences or the things you miss about them. Some people write journal entries directed toward their loved ones. Even if you cry or feel worse while writing, it may feel good to simply get the feelings out.

Get support. Even if you’re not comfortable asking for help, getting support can be the best way to move through the grieving process. Lean on family and friends. Talk to a spiritual adviser, grief counselor, or therapist. Join a support group.

Participate in the ceremonies and rituals that are a part of your religion or belief system. Your culture and rituals affect how you process loss. A ceremony or ritual may help you acknowledge grief and move through it. Meditating, praying, and surrounding yourself with others who share your beliefs can help.

Prepare for grief triggers. It’s normal to be sad on the anniversary of the loss or other milestone days. As time goes by, you will likely bounce back from your grief triggers more quickly. You may want to spend these days with friends and family.

Avoid pressure to “get over it.” Many well-intended friends or family may tell you to “be strong” or “move on.” These statements are not helpful. You must move through the grieving process at your own pace to truly recover.

Take care of your health. Regular exercise may help improve symptoms of grief. It is important to eat a healthy diet, get enough sleep, and avoid alcohol and other substances that numb your pain. It will take longer to heal if you try to numb the pain, and may increase your risk for substance abuse problems.

The goal of recovery is not to get rid of your feelings, but to make sure the loss is only a part of your life experience and not the center of it. When you move through grief and are able to accept the loss, you can then turn your energy toward other areas of your life. You may always feel the loss, but it will not take over your life.



Sleeping Well

Getting a good night's sleep is vital for health. After losing a loved one, it is sometimes difficult to sleep well. Perhaps you are used to sleeping with your loved one and now your bed feels empty. Or perhaps during the night you think a lot about your loved one. It can take time to get back to a regular sleep pattern while you are grieving. We can help you with sleeplessness.

Relaxation Exercises for Healthy Sleep

Relaxation exercises are a great way to clear your mind, relax your body, and get ready for sleep. You can reduce your stress by doing them during the day, but they can be especially helpful as you are getting ready to fall asleep or if you wake up in the middle of the night.

These exercises use abdominal breathing techniques for a few seconds or a few minutes to relax your muscles and clear your mind. Turning down the lights and finding a comfortable position during these activities will help you become sleepy. You can do them with your eyes open or closed.

- **Neck and shoulder release.** Take a deep breath and focus on your head, neck, and shoulders. Hold your breath and then breathe out slowly. Breathe in again and slowly raise your shoulders toward your ears. As you breathe out, imagine all the tension in your neck, shoulders, and back leaving through your breath. Allow your shoulders to drop slightly as you exhale. Repeat.
- **Breathing to a count.** Inhale to the count of 4, taking a slow, deep breath. Hold your breath for a moment and then breathe out slowly while you count to 4. Repeat. Breathe in and out through your nose.
- **Cleansing breath.** Inhale slowly through your nose to the count of 4, exhale through your mouth, and as you exhale, blow as if you are slowly blowing out a candle, so it flickers but doesn't go out. Repeat. Then inhale slowly through your nose to a count of 4 and exhale through your mouth, strongly blowing out the imaginary candle. Blow out as much held tension as you can.
- **Tense, hold, release.** Breathe in and tense all the muscles you can at once. Hold your breath, then slowly breathe out, letting all the tension go. Repeat this several times. This exercise is not recommended for patients with fibromyalgia or other chronic musculoskeletal pain.
- **Relaxing sigh.** Sit or stand up straight. Breathe in and hold your breath. Exhale, sighing deeply, and make an exaggerated "Ahhhhh" sound. Repeat this 10 times.



Kaiser Permanente offers bereavement support groups. To find out more, call your local Bereavement Coordinator. Phone numbers are listed in the letter you received with this handout.



This information is not intended to diagnose health problems or to take the place of medical advice or care you receive from your physician or other health care professional. If you have persistent health problems, or if you have additional questions, please consult your doctor.

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