

TAKE STEPS

One of the most disorienting aspects of the grief process is that basic habits that might help to keep you afloat—like deep sleep, exercise and calm contemplation—can seem to demand a focus or inner drive you may not be able to summon up right now. Just know that when you are ready, any or all of those possibilities are available, and every little bit can help. Some thoughts on making a start:

BATHE THE SPIRIT

Grief is a journey through a wide range of strong feelings that can sometimes take you off guard. “A mindfulness practice may help you to recognize these feelings as natural and accept them so they can eventually flow more gently,” says Samuel Dexter, MDiv., MSW, BCC, Manager of Spiritual Care at Regional Hospice. “Calming the spirit, or reaching a state where you are able to let thoughts wash through you can be as deliberate as joining a meditation class or as simple as eating lunch outside.”

A few more thoughts:

- Connect with nature. This can be in your own backyard, sitting on a dock with your feet dangling in the water or taking a hike.
- Get a massage. Gentle touch can increase the relaxation response, which quiets your nervous system and increases a feeling of calm.
- Write in a journal. Don't worry about making sense, just allow your thoughts to emerge.
- Engage in a simple activity that occupies your body while allowing your mind to roam—paint by numbers, pull weeds or copy over passages from books.

RELAX THE MIND

Shakespeare had it right when he wrote about “Sleep that knits up the raveled sleeve of care.” But sleep can be elusive when you are grieving a loss. Your body clock seems to have gone haywire—you are wide awake at 3:00 AM, asleep on the sofa at noon. Or you may want to sleep all the time. Sometimes you are almost afraid to close your eyes—who wants those dreams?—and sometimes too anxious about facing the day to want to open them up again.



These are normal reactions to the stress, anxiety and depression that may accompany grief. But sleep can truly be, as Shakespeare also said, “the balm of hurt minds.”

A pre-sleep routine like a warm bath, a cup of herbal tea, reading a book or calm stretching exercises can signal your mind that it's time to nod off. For now, just do what you can, reassured that we at Regional Hospice are here to support your experience with compassion and understanding.

STIR THE BODY

Everyone's reaction to grief is different and that includes desire for physical activity. Even moderate exercise creates a halo of benefits, from helping you feel more energetic and in charge of yourself, to improving your appetite and helping you sleep at night.

- Simply move your body. Doing something is better than doing nothing, whether that means walking to the end of the block, doing some stretches or going for a quiet swim.
- Exercise releases endorphins, feel-good chemicals in the brain that reduce pain, anxiety and stress.
- Physical movement in its many forms, from yoga to a game of tennis, is an instant distraction that helps break the cycle of depression and refocus the mind.
- Whether you are actively exercising or not, please remember to stay hydrated. Dehydration can make stress, depression and tiredness worse while drinking plenty of fluids can help support mood and concentration.