



Coping with Grief and Loss Through Physical Activity

Engaging in physical activity—such as walking, running, hiking or riding a bicycle—can help you cope with negative feelings you may be experiencing.

What is Grief?

Grief is the experience of loss, such as the loss of a loved one, a job or after the diagnosis of an illness. Grief is a part of life that everyone will experience, but that doesn't mean you must continue suffering. Everyone copes in different ways to the changes in their life. Physical activity is a healthy way to cope and reduce the symptoms of grief by releasing endorphins in the brain and improving mood.

Stages of Grief

- **Denial:** You might not believe that your loss has really occurred.
- **Anger:** You might be angry at yourself, your family members, or a higher power.
- **Bargaining:** You might try to negotiate with yourself or, if you are religious, the figure you pray to in order to regain your loss or some piece of mind.
- **Depression:** This might be an emotional low point for you, when you don't care about anything or anyone. You might go through feelings of emptiness, loneliness, or might even stop caring about anything or anyone.
- **Acceptance:** At this point, you may begin to make peace with the fact that your loss has occurred and there are changes in your life you must adjust to.

Possible Reasons for Experiencing Loss or Grief:

- Loss of a spouse or family member
- Loss of a job
- Loss of driver's licence
- Loss of ability to do previous activities or tasks
- Major life changes (i.e. moving out of your home)
- Diagnosis of a chronic condition or loss of independence

Exercise Can Help Combat Symptoms of Grief!

Regular involvement in physical activity provides both short and long term psychological benefits. One hundred and fifty minutes of physical activity a week is all it takes to start seeing these health benefits!

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How Exercise Affects Your Emotions:

- Exercise increases blood flow to the brain and releases chemicals called neurotransmitters which calm or stimulate the brain, depending on the circumstances.
- Serotonin and GABA are calming chemicals that create a balanced mood, decrease depression, and increase focus and motivation.
- Norepinephrine and Epinephrine are stimulating chemicals or neurotransmitters that increase anxiety when it is necessary in times of danger, balance energy, improve focus and sleep habits, and regulate heart rate and blood pressure.
- Dopamine is both a calming and stimulating neurotransmitter which also helps to decrease depression and increase focus and motivation.
- Regular physical activity can help regulate all neurotransmitters, aiding in positive mood.



Give yourself a break from grief by getting out in nature and engaging in physical activity!

Pay attention to what brings you pleasure and makes you feel at peace.

Use it as a tool to relax your body and mind.

(i.e. the beauty of nature, music as you dance, or the birds chirping as you take a brisk morning walk, etc.)

Benefits of Physical Activity:

- When we are physically active, our bodies release endorphins which help to reduce symptoms of grief, depression, anxiety and stress
- Being physically active can help to maintain your independence and therefore also your quality of life
- Physical activity provides feelings of relaxation, enjoyment and pleasure
- Increases self-esteem
- Improves mental health and mood
- Improves abilities to do daily activities
- Increases opportunities to make friends

Signs & Symptoms of Grief:

- Denial or shock
- Outburst of anger
- Depression
- Panic attacks, anxiety
- Loss of appetite
- Inability to concentrate
- Restlessness
- Inability to complete tasks
- Tightness in the throat
- Need to retell stories about their negative experience
- Wandering aimlessly throughout the home
- Lowered self-esteem
- Irritability, moodiness
- Withdrawal or isolation



For more information or references used, contact Forever...in motion at
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