

Treatment of Grief and Depression at the End of Life

What is grief?

If you are very sick or are nearing the end of life, you may have some losses. You may lose your health, wealth, independence, or close relationships with your friends and family. All of these losses can be hard to cope with. It's normal to have feelings of grief from these losses.

What does grief feel like?

You may have feelings of anger, disbelief, longing, sadness, helplessness, and guilt. You may also feel nervous or tired, have changes in your sleep and appetite, and be less social.

How is grief treated?

Most people cope with grief by talking to their family, friends, or a member of their church that they trust, such as a priest, pastor, or rabbi. You may also feel like talking to your doctor, counselor, or therapist, or using support groups. There is no right or wrong way to grieve.

How is grief different from depression?

It is normal for you to feel sad when you are very sick. However, feeling sad all the

time; feeling hopeless, helpless, or guilty; not enjoying life; and thinking about suicide are not normal. These feelings may be a sign of major depression, which is a serious medical illness that needs to be treated.

How is depression treated?

Even though you may become depressed near the end of life, there are ways to help you feel better. Talking with your doctor or a therapist can help. Your doctor can give you medicine to help your symptoms, improve the quality of your life, lower stress on your family members, and may even prolong your life.

Where can I get more information?

Your doctor

Caring Connections

Web site: <http://www.caringinfo.org>

Griefnet

Web site: <http://www.griefnet.org>

Hospice Foundation of America

Web site: <http://www.hospicefoundation.org>

August 2012

This handout is provided to you by your family doctor and the American Academy of Family Physicians. Other health-related information is available from the AAFP online at <http://familydoctor.org>.

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