



after suicide – self care

Dr Sheila Clark

The severe stress caused by grief brings about a number of changes to the body. Glands release chemicals called hormones. These circulate in the blood stream and stimulate many parts of the body putting them on alert. Adrenalin is one of these. In addition, the nervous system is put into overdrive. These mechanisms prepare your body to cope with extreme physical and emotional effort.

Because organs such as the bowel and the heart are charged up by these mechanisms, you may experience physical symptoms: loss of appetite, nausea, abdominal pain, changed bowel habits, alteration to your normal period pattern, tremor, headaches, sleeplessness, palpitations and chest pains. These are only some of the reactions which can occur. Each person's experience is different.

At this time when you may feel able to live only an hour at a time, a regular routine provides structure to your day. Get up, dress, shop, walk and go to bed at regular times. Have set meal times, even if you do not feel like eating.

If you lose your appetite you may find it easier to eat several small meals or snacks rather than three large meals a day. Try to include a selection from breads and cereals, meat, fish, dairy products and fruit and vegetables.

Regular exercise helps you cope better with your grief. It also helps to use up some of your extra adrenalin. It will also make you tired and help you to sleep better. Start with a gentle walk around a park near your home. This has the additional benefit of taking you out into nature and it often calms the mind.

Deep relaxation, meditation and massage may help relieve physical tension in the muscles and will release endorphins which will lift your mood. Guided meditation CD's, stress management classes, yoga, Tai Chi, music...all of these can help.

Pets are often a great comfort in bereavement. Animals can be very sensitive to your feelings of sadness. Cuddling a cat or dog can be very soothing.

Fun - Although it seems hard, it is important to spoil yourself and to make an effort to have pleasurable activities. Try to do something pleasurable for yourself each day and do not allow yourself to feel guilty for doing this.

Try to develop a relaxing pre-sleep routine to help you get off to sleep. Listen to some relaxing music, read a light book, take a warm bath or shower, have a milk drink with a teaspoon of sugar.

Although it may be tempting to seek relief through alcohol, feelings of grief may be worsened and normal coping mechanisms lost. This will delay you on your grief journey.

Dr Sheila Clark is an Australian author of **After Suicide – Help for the Bereaved**. She has worked extensively as a counsellor and on the professional advisory council of a support group for people who have been bereaved through suicide. She is a practising General Practitioner and University Lecturer.