

Coping with Grief and Loss

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Being there matters.

What is Grief?

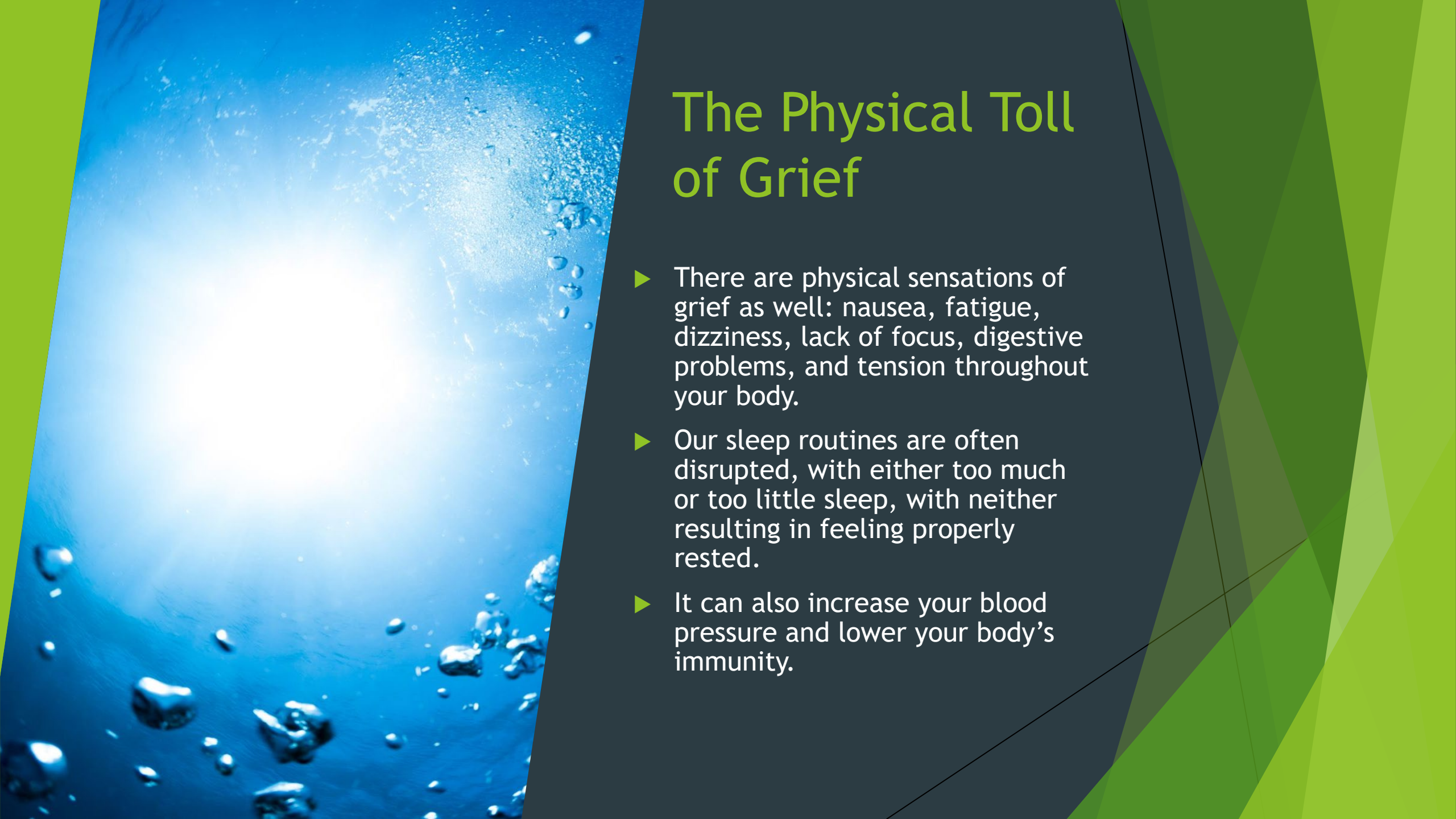
- ▶ Grief is the natural response to loss. We typically associate with the loss of a loved one, although it can encompass a number of specific or abstract losses.
- ▶ Many emotions can surface through grief and loss: sadness, despair, guilt, regret, hopelessness, and even anger. It is important to be aware of and accept them.
- ▶ There is no right or wrong way to grieve, and there is no prescribed path or timeline when you will feel better.





The Emotional Toll of Grief

- ▶ Sitting in your emotions is difficult when it feels like your emotions are overwhelming and all encompassing.
- ▶ Remind yourself that your grief is a natural response to loss.
- ▶ You will likely feel consumed by grief, at least initially.
- ▶ Take some time to yourself when you can. Name your emotions. Reflect on why you're feeling them.



The Physical Toll of Grief

- ▶ There are physical sensations of grief as well: nausea, fatigue, dizziness, lack of focus, digestive problems, and tension throughout your body.
- ▶ Our sleep routines are often disrupted, with either too much or too little sleep, with neither resulting in feeling properly rested.
- ▶ It can also increase your blood pressure and lower your body's immunity.

Acute Grief

- ▶ This is what we feel initially when we experience grief, shortly after the loss.
- ▶ There are feelings of intense desire to be reunited with the lost loved one, severe emotional pain, and bouts of crying and sadness.
- ▶ Frequent distracting thoughts, trouble focusing, and a feeling of longing are all expected during the acute grief stage.
- ▶ We also tend to have a sense of unreality or a dreamlike trance during this stage, accompanied with social withdrawal and isolation.

Integrated Grief

- ▶ When we begin to integrate and accept the loss into our life, we enter into this stage.
- ▶ You find a way of staying connected to the deceased without them being physically present.
- ▶ You can engage in other activities without actively thinking about your loss.
- ▶ This does not mean you've forgotten them or miss them any less, but rather found a healthy way of integrating the loss into your life.
- ▶ There can still be times of acute grief, typically surrounding significant holidays or anniversaries. This is normal and expected.

Complicated Grief

- ▶ Sometimes you aren't able to healthily integrate loss into your life.
- ▶ The natural healing process is impeded by acute grief symptoms.
- ▶ Work, social life, and self-image are all negatively and severely impacted.
- ▶ If complicated grief endures, seeking professional help is highly recommended.

Collective Grief

- ▶ Over the last two and a half years, we have experienced what can be called collective grief.
- ▶ Grief doesn't always have to stem from a loss of something specific, like a family member, friend, or pet.
- ▶ We've all experienced a loss of connection, a loss of normalcy, a loss of routine and habits.



The Stages of Grief

- ▶ We have typically been taught there are five stages of grief: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and finally, acceptance.
- ▶ While these all likely occur during a grief process, they rarely happen in linear fashion, moving from one to the next and coming out the other side.
- ▶ More than likely, we experience these stages in a more complicated fashion, with some occurring at the same time, or moving between them from moment to moment, or skipping them entirely.
- ▶ No grief process is pre-written, and you can't "do it wrong." With that being said, if the symptoms of grief are disrupting your life persistently, its time to seek help.



Healthy Coping Strategies

- ▶ The Big Three: Sleep, Appetite, and Exercise.
- ▶ Reach out to people in your life: friends, family, loved ones, professionals.
- ▶ Try and resume normal activities, even if you have to adjust your expectations. Used to run 5km? Try going for a walk. Used to journal paragraphs a day? Jot down a couple of gratitudes when you can.
- ▶ Recognize the hard work you've put in, and be gentle with yourself.
- ▶ Lean into self care: a bubble bath, a podcast, a nice meal.
- ▶ Asking for help isn't a weakness; quite the opposite, in fact. None of us can get through this alone. Admitting this and accepting help is an act of strength.



Grief Myths

- ▶ The pain will go away faster if I ignore it.
- ▶ You must be “strong” in the face of loss.
- ▶ Moving on means forgetting about your loss.
- ▶ If you don’t cry, it means you’re not sorry for your loss.



Supporting Others

- ▶ If someone in your life is dealing with grief, there are many ways to support them.
- ▶ Listen to them. When coping with grief, communicating emotions and opening up to someone is a valuable experience. Be non-judgmental and present, and let them know you are there for them.
- ▶ Remind them that grief exists for a reason, and that it is a necessary component of healing. Emotions are always changing, and just because they feel that way now doesn't mean they will forever.
- ▶ If you feel a friend, coworker, or loved one is in need of extra support, it's ok to suggest that they reach out to a professional.
- ▶ Remember to take care of yourself while supporting others.



In Summary

- ▶ We all have experienced grief and loss over the last year to some degree.
- ▶ Coping with grief takes support, self-care, awareness, and opening up to people in your life that you trust.
- ▶ Grief is complex, personal, and difficult. There is not a 'one size fits all' solution.
- ▶ Although we have had to adjust to new conditions throughout the pandemic, there are resources and tools available: counselling via webcam and telephone, video chats with friends and family, walks outside either alone or socially distant with friends, connecting with your doctor via telehealth if necessary.

