Grief in one page

What it is

What is grief?

Grief is the natural emotional response to losing someone or something important. It often brings intense sadness and other feelings, and for most people it eases over time. Everyone grieves differently, and normal grief is not an illness.

The signs

What are the symptoms of grief?

Grief can bring shock, numbness, sadness, longing, anger, guilt and anxiety, along with poor sleep, tiredness, aches and trouble concentrating. It often comes in waves. Grief that stays intense for more than 6 months and stops you functioning may be prolonged grief.

Where to start

What happens in the first week after a death?

A doctor confirms the death, the funeral director usually registers it, and your state's registry issues the death certificate. Your jobs: find the will, choose the funeral, and tell Services Australia within 28 days if they got a payment.

Treatment

If my GP or psychologist thinks it is prolonged grief disorder, what happens: how is it assessed, and does my care?

Your GP talks with you about your grief and how it affects your life, often uses a questionnaire, and decides whether to record a provisional or formal diagnosis on your mental health plan. Therapy is still through the plan. A guideline names grief-focused cognitive behaviour therapy for prolonged grief disorder, and your existing plan is usually updated, not replaced.

Medication

Is there medicine for grief and PTSD?

For PTSD, sometimes. Healthdirect says medicine may be suggested when PTSD symptoms are more severe, usually alongside talking therapy, and antidepressants are the most useful type. Talking therapy comes first. We found no Australian source on medicine for grief itself. A doctor decides with you, and you keep in regular contact while you take it.

- Talking therapy is first-line for PTSD
- Medicine may help if PTSD is more severe

Who diagnoses and who prescribes

Who prescribes if grief brings sleep or mood problems?

No medicine is listed for grief itself. A PBS search for grief and bereavement found nothing, and a psychiatry guideline names none for prolonged grief disorder. If grief brings low mood or poor sleep, your GP looks at that as its own condition. Any script would be for that condition, such as depression or insomnia, under that condition's rules.

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What it costs

What does help cost under Medicare?

It depends on what each clinician charges. With a mental health treatment plan, Medicare pays part of the fee for up to 10 individual psychology sessions each calendar year. The fee is usually more than the rebate, so you pay a gap. Some services are free, such as the Traumatic Stress Clinic in Sydney.

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- Up to 10 individual sessions a year

In danger? Call 000. Lifeline 13 11 14, text 0477 13 11 14, or chat online.

Suicide Call Back Service 1300 659 467. Free counselling by phone or video, any hour.

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