

Adjusting Back to Work and Life

LET'S FACE IT. If you work, or have an active social life, a big challenge in our culture is the expectations of employers, colleagues and friends. They often expect that, after a brief leave, you'll return from the loss of a loved one and dive right back into the swim. But it can be easy to sink in such a situation.

A sports analogy. — Think of a pro athlete who gets hurt. The team or coach first puts you on "injured reserve." After a hospital stay, you move on to rehab. You move forward, but at a pace that doctors and therapists say is safe and strengthening.

Next, it's back to the sport. But maybe it's in the minor leagues or on the practice squad. Only after months, sometimes longer, do you return to the big-league spotlight. It's

time plus work that heals you.

Even in the everyday world, right after major surgery, no one expects you to resume a full workload right away. Employers give you sick time. Then, when you return to work, a good employer understands you may produce at a lower level.

Or you may need accommodations for a while until you get back up to speed.

If you are in school, you can get "incompletes" in your courses. A reasonable schedule is worked out to finish your work. Or they let you drop courses without being labeled "fail."

It is like a surgery. — Bereavement is much like recovering from a surgery where a body part has been



removed. You need time, personal determination, the help of others and attention to your own care.

If you have an employer who is understanding, work out some realistic accommodations. Whether they are or not, use whatever sick leave time you have liberally. Discuss it with your doctor, getting legitimate documentation, if you require it. ■

Five Basics for Handling the Stress of Loss

THE DEATH OF A LOVED ONE is a major cause of stress. And we now know that severe stress can hurt your health and even cause illness. It's important to be aware of this. Taking care of both your physical health and mental health can help you greatly as you grieve.

1. Get a physical. — Make an appointment with your doctor within 6 months of your loved one's passing. An annual physical is, of course, a good habit. If it's coming up, keep it. If it's a number of months away, call to move it up.

2. Eat right. — Your body needs to get good nourishment more than ever. If your appetite is gone, consider food to be a medicine. If getting yourself to eat well is tough, think about vitamins and nutritional supplements. If you already take them, keep them up. In any case, consult with a pharmacist or doctor about what vitamins and supplements might be best in your situation.

3. Don't eat too much. — Sometimes a grief reaction involving food is to start snacking. You might console yourself with "comfort foods." If you see that you're doing this, work on avoiding it.

4. Exercise. — If you used to exercise, get back to it. It may take time. If you've exercised regularly, don't

stop now. You may wish, however, to ease your program and work back toward your usual levels. If you don't exercise, this may be a good time to start.

Exercise relieves anxiety and tension and acts as a natural anti-depressant. It can help you sleep better, too. Get out and walk. Perhaps join a walking group to keep you motivated. An hour walk daily is ideal. If you're more fit already, join a hiking, running or biking group.



5. Sleep & rest. — Insomnia or disturbed sleep patterns is common. That said, it can exhaust you both physically and mentally. Try to maintain good sleeping habits. Go to bed a little earlier if you discover you're tired every morning. Over-the-counter remedies may be tempting, but be sparing with them. And if your insomnia becomes severe, consult a doctor. ■

Our newsletter is published by NICHE Custom Publishing (nichecust.com).

It is printed by Elk Grove Graphics (elkgrovegraphics.com), with data managed by its sister company, Morph (morph-data.com).

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