

Grief and depression – How are they different?

The loss of a loved one brings a period of grief and mourning that is filled with feelings of sadness, anxiety, guilt and reliving of the past shared with the person who died. People in the midst of mourning have described experiences such as: crying, not being hungry, nausea, tearfulness and restless sleep. Also guilt about not being able to prevent the death from having occurred and deep feelings of sadness. Many have described the feelings of grief sweeping over them and then subsiding until the process starts again. Many of these symptoms are shared by people with depression; however grief and depression are different.

While we all feel sad, moody or low from time to time, some people experience these feelings intensely, for long periods of time, and sometimes without any apparent reason. Depression is more than just a low mood – it's a serious condition that affects your physical and mental health.

To others, grief may be perceived as depression, but there are distinct differences between grief and depression. **Grief is an expression of love after a loss**, whereas depression usually results from a combination of recent events and other longer-term factors, rather than immediate issues or events.

The following are some of the differences and similarities of grieving after a loss compared to depression. This list is not exhaustive, and not everyone experiences all of these:

Grief & Depression

- Sadness, despair.
- Tears.
- Loss of appetite (or increase – comfort eating).
- Powerlessness & helplessness.
- Poor concentration.
- Poor sleep, nightmares, waking through the night – or sleeping a lot (comfort sleeping).

Grief

- Mourning.
- Anger – with self, others, the deceased.
- Fatigue or low energy.
- Temporary loss of interest in pleasurable activities.
- Suicidal thoughts – yearning to be with your loved one.
- Feelings of guilt about the death.
- Happy and sad memories – fluctuation in feeling.

Gradually, and after an undetermined amount of time, these feelings stop as the person regains their balance and their life grows around their loss.

Grieving is not easy, but it's normal.

Depression

- Worthlessness.
- Exaggerated fatigue.
- Loss of interest in pleasurable activities.
- Suicidal thoughts.
- Persistent globalised guilt.
- Low self-esteem.
- Overall negative outlook (lack of hope).

In major depression, these feelings are continual. For instance, daily functioning at work and home are impaired and the individual feels as if they will never climb out of these feelings.

Often medical/psychological assistance is helpful.