

IS IT GRIEF OR IS IT DEPRESSION?

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Understanding the difference between grief and depression is vitally important, especially when a death has occurred. Depression is a serious illness that can cripple a person's life. It is a chemical imbalance in the brain which is treatable. When people are depressed they normally do not know it. Currently, an estimated 35 to 40 million people will suffer from some major depressive illness in their lifetime. Left untreated, depression can increase in severity. Grieving, however, usually lessens with time.



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1. **Feeling sadness continually:** Grieving generally takes one to three years. While you are grieving, not only will you feel sadness, you will have times of lighter mood. However, if your sadness is continual with no breaks, it could be a warning sign of depression.
2. **Lack of interest:** Losing a loved one can paralyze you. With depression, many things you used to be interested in may not hold your interest. Your interest in favorite hobbies and activities should start to return after several months.
3. **Eating too much or too little:** Right after a loss people may not be hungry. If after two months you have lost a significant amount of weight (and are not trying to) or have gained too much weight, you could be leaning toward depression.
4. **Sleeping problems:** Sleeping can be a problem for grieving people. However, when you are clinically depressed, normal sleep patterns do not return. If your sleeping does not start to become normal, consult a doctor.
5. **Psychomotor:** If other people notice that you are restless or your movements are slow and deliberate, you might be depressed.
6. **Loss of energy:** Grief and depression soak up all of a person's energy. Often times, it is hard to go on with life because of the depth of your loss. As time moves on however, grief recedes and energy slowly trickles back. If after two months your energy has not started to return, you are most likely depressed.
7. **Thoughts:** Thoughts are as big a part of depression as actions. If you think thoughts like, "I am nothing", "Now that I have suffered this loss I am no one", "No one likes me", you may be feeling worthless which is a sign of depression.
8. **Change in concentration:** A death can make you forgetful in the short run because grief is consuming. If you find it is hard to concentrate on anything for very long or make decisions, you could be suffering from grief. If these symptoms continue they likely point to depression.
9. **Wanting to die:** Some people wish they could have died instead of the person who did die. This may be particularly so with parents who have lost a child. However, thinking about dying yourself, making comments about wishing you were dead, or thoughts of suicide are something to be taken seriously. You must contact a therapist, psychologist or a doctor. If you have plans to commit suicide please call 911 or go to your local emergency room.

Depression is a serious illness that affects the mind, body, and spirit but it can be treated. It does not have to be a permanent condition. Contact the National Institute of Mental Health at 1-800-421-4211 or www.nimh.nih.gov, which provides free information on depression and other mental illnesses in both English and Spanish. If you are suicidal please contact the National Suicide Hotline at 1-800-SUICIDE (1-800-784-2433).