

## **Depression and grief**

NetDoctor.co.uk

Grief and depression are different. It is possible to grieve without being depressed, but many of the feelings are similar.

However, about 33 per cent of bereaved people also have a depressive illness one month after the loss, and 15 per cent are still depressed a year later.

Symptoms that suggest a bereaved person is also depressed include:

- intense feelings of guilt not related to the bereavement.
- thoughts of suicide or a preoccupation with dying.
- feelings of worthlessness.
- markedly slow speech and movements, lying in bed doing nothing all day.
- prolonged or severe inability to function (not able to work, socialise or enjoy any leisure activity).
- prolonged hallucinations of the deceased, or hallucinations unrelated to the bereavement.

### **Who is likely to get depression after a bereavement?**

It is difficult to judge who will or won't suffer depression after a bereavement. However, risk factors thought to increase the chance include the following:

- a previous history of depression
- intense grief or depressive symptoms early in the grief reaction
- few social supports
- little experience of death.
- 

### **Treatment for grief and depression**

The support of family and friends is invaluable to anyone - especially at difficult times. Sadness after bereavement is natural: it is normal to want to discuss the deceased and become upset while doing so. Expressing feeling does not make things worse.

If depression is thought to be present then antidepressants are very likely to be used. Antidepressants will treat the depression, but they do not have any affect on the underlying grief. Untreated depression, however, makes it extremely difficult to grieve effectively.

GPs, counselors and psychiatrists are aware of the many different normal responses to loss and are reluctant to diagnose a person as mentally ill during bereavement. They will usually provide support to help the person grieve. A psychiatrist is only likely to be involved if the bereavement is complicated by a depressive illness.

Grief counseling helps mourning by allowing someone to work through the stages of grief in a supported relationship. The goals of grief counseling include:

- accepting the loss and talking about it.
- identifying and expressing feelings related to the loss (anger, guilt, anxiety, helplessness, sadness).
- living without the deceased and making decisions alone.
- separating emotionally and forming new relationships.
- the provision of support.
- identifying ways of coping that suit the bereaved. explaining the grieving process.