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I can't concentrate and I fear I will make mistakes

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The death of someone close to you brings many changes in your life. Adjusting to these changes can be challenging, especially when you may be feeling overwhelmed with emotions as you go through the ups and downs of the grieving process.

This brochure provides information, ideas, strategies, and suggestions to help you recognize, anticipate, and meet these challenges.

Decision-making

It can be difficult to make decisions – even small ones – when you are grieving. This may be especially true when it's your partner who has died and he or she was the one you usually talked with to discuss options and make decisions.

You may also find that your memory, concentration and thinking may be affected by your emotions, leaving you feeling less sure of yourself than usual.

This may help...

- If possible, put off making any major decisions until you're feeling more comfortable and confident.
- If the decision can't wait, talk things over with a person you trust – a professional, family member, or friend.
- Explain the problem and your goal as clearly as possible.

- Make a list of as many solutions as you can think of. Note the pros and cons and all the steps needed for each solution.
- Review all the information and look for anything you may have missed.
- Choose the best option from your list and follow through step by step.

Dealing with financial affairs

Settling an estate is difficult for most grieving people. You may feel worried that you don't have the knowledge or experience to deal with all the financial and legal matters. Perhaps you are feeling overwhelmed thinking about paying bills, making decisions about money or real estate, and planning for your financial future.

This may help...

- Take as much time as you need and be careful when making decisions.
- Tap into the expertise of your bank or credit union.
- Ask a reputable lawyer, accountant, or financial advisor for help.
 - Trusted friends can provide recommendations, but use your own good judgment as well.
 - If you can't get a recommendation for a particular professional, ask for references and professional affiliations.
- Before making any final decisions, review your plans with a trusted professional.

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Sorting through personal belongings

You may experience powerful memories and emotions while going through the personal belongings of someone who has died. Sometimes just the idea of getting rid of some items may be painful and overwhelming, and it can be difficult to even think about finding the energy to go through everything.

This may help...

- If there is no particular time when you must take on this task, it's OK to wait to do it when you feel more ready.
- Take your time. You may find it easier to sort through things a bit at a time, or you may want to set aside some time to do it all at once. Do what feels right to you.
- Divide belongings into groups: things to keep; things for family and friends; things for sale or charity; things to decide about later.
- Ask friends or family members to help you.
 - Sometimes, family members will have different thoughts and approaches to the task. It's important to talk about these differences openly, keeping in mind that compromise might be necessary.

Encountering memories and reminders

As you go through the grieving process, you may find yourself thinking over and over about past events. You may also find it difficult to spend time in certain places that carry memories for you.

This may help...

- Try to think of these reminders as a natural part of grieving and a way to help you to come to terms with what has happened. Over time, it will become easier to deal with your sadness as the intensity of your feelings lessens.
- It's natural and normal for you to go over memories, so allow yourself to do that.
 - However, if the sad feelings begin to seriously and constantly interfere with your everyday life, you may find it helpful to talk to a bereavement or health care professional.

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- Share your memories with others who will just listen – friends, family, or members of a bereavement support group.
- If you have questions about the care received by the person who died or about their final hours, contact a health care provider. They will do their best to answer any questions you may have.
- If you are troubled by thoughts about what you or others did or could have done, talk to a trusted friend, a bereavement volunteer or a bereavement counsellor.
- You may find it helpful to change your routines or schedules.
 - For example, you could sleep or eat in different rooms than you did before, re-arrange some of your furniture, or temporarily put away sentimental objects.
- It's OK for you to avoid going to certain places for a while.



- Be aware that visiting familiar places may be difficult. If you need to re-visit a place that holds painful memories, ask someone you trust to go with you.

Managing changes in relationships

All of the relationships in your life will be affected by the loss of someone important to you. You may notice, for example, that some people behave differently around you and could be surprised or disappointed by things they say or do – or don't do. You may also find that other people will unexpectedly come forward to offer their support.

It's also possible that you may not want to visit with people while you're grieving because you are not ready to or you worry that your sadness will be a burden to others.



This may help...

- Remember that the grieving process is yours and yours alone. It's important that you pay attention to your changing emotional needs and responses.
- Spend time with welcoming and supportive people who you know to be OK with your grief.
- Let people know what is—and is not—helpful to you.
- Tell supportive friends about the things you find difficult, and ask for their help.
 - For example, if you feel you can't make plans too far in advance, ask if you can have the option to change your mind later.
- It's OK to say “no” to people or plans that you don't feel ready for.
- Take the steps to find the support you need; consider joining a grief support group.

Having dreams and visitations

After someone close to you dies, you may have dreams about him or her that seem very real. You may also sense that person's presence visiting beside and around you as you go through your day. It's also possible that even though you dearly *want* a dream or visitation, you may not experience either.

All of these situations may either comfort or upset you.

This may help...

- Remind yourself that these experiences – or lack of them – are normal.
- If you often wake up in distress after dreaming about the person, try some relaxation techniques or talk to a health care provider about medication that may help.
- If during the day you are troubled by images or feelings, do some physical exercise: take a walk or run in the fresh air; visit the gym; go to the pool to swim or paddle.
- Sometimes we are curious about our experiences and want to explore them. Try writing down your dreams or visitation experiences in a journal and then set aside some dedicated time to think about them.
- If you wonder whether your experiences are normal and feel hesitant to talk about them, seek out a trusted friend, counselor, or other grieving person.

Looking after your health

While you are grieving, you may not feel you have the energy to look after yourself. However, this is a time when you are at greater risk of illness and accidents because of fatigue, stress and distraction, so it's particularly important to make special efforts to take care of your health.

As often as possible, try to eat and sleep regularly. Focus on good nutrition. Avoid unhelpful or harmful coping patterns or people. Take time to connect with your body, thoughts, feelings, and beliefs.

This may help...

In general

- Visit your health care provider and tell him or her that

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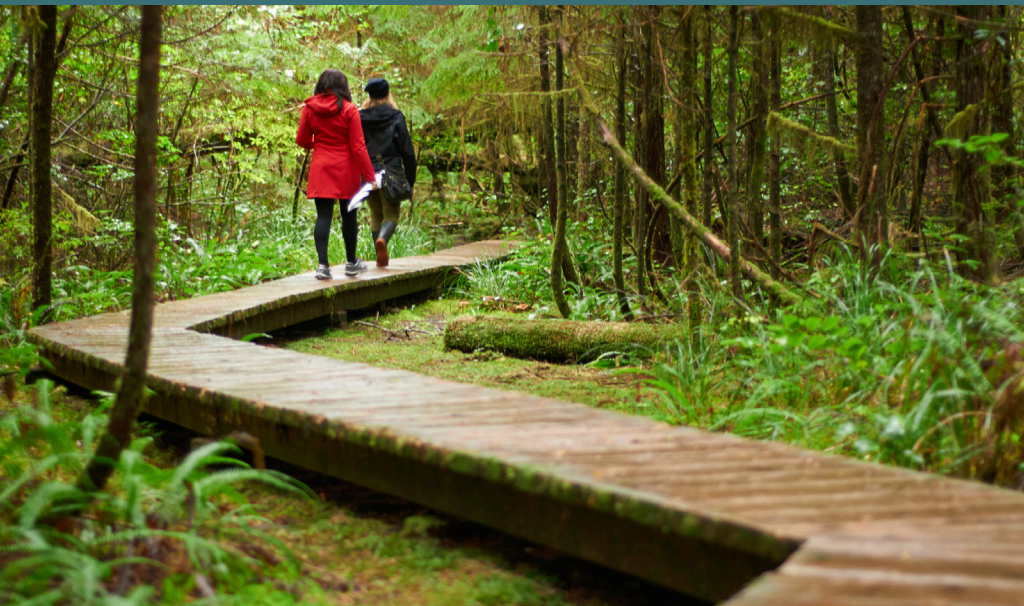
you are grieving.

- Pace yourself: your energy level will go up and down.
- Exercise regularly. Choose something you can stick with and enjoy.
- This might be a time when you are tempted to use alcohol or drugs to escape the pain of your grief. Be careful, as these can interfere with the natural grieving process. If you are unsure of the balance, consult with your health care provider or trusted counselor.

Sleeping

If you have trouble falling or staying asleep:

- Avoid alcohol and caffeine during the day.
- Refrain from watching television or engaging in physical



exercise in the evening.

- Try natural remedies such as herbal teas, warm milk, soothing baths, quiet music, or relaxation exercises. Prescription medicines can help temporarily or on occasion.
- Change your sleeping habits for a while.
 - For example, sleep in a different room or on the other side of the bed; go to bed later; sleep with an extra pillow or a stuffed animal for comfort.
- Read something light and easy, like a magazine.
- Recall a favourite scene or trip in as much detail as possible. You might also try daydreaming – plan a trip or plot a novel. Just be sure to avoid any activity that is overly energizing.
- If you can't go to sleep after 30 minutes, get up and do something pleasant and relaxing.
- If you can't get or return to sleep, let go of any effort to sleep and tell yourself that you are simply going to rest.



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Eating

- Even if you don't feel hungry, eating small amounts of healthy foods will give you energy. You may also want to add a vitamin or nutritional drink.
- If you feel more hungry than usual, eat healthy snacks and meals such as fruits, nuts, and vegetables. Avoid snacking on junk food.
- If making meals is challenging for you, try buying some ready-made, healthy meals from a grocery store or ordering from a food catering service.
 - The Champlain Health Line at <http://www.champlainhealthline.ca/> provides a list of frozen meals and/or meal delivery services in the region under "Home and Community Care."
 - If you have never prepared meals before, contact your local recreational or seniors' centre to ask about cooking classes or sharing kitchens.
- Accept meal invitations from supportive friends or invite them to your home for take-out meals. You might consider letting trusted friends know about your difficulties and asking them to help out in any way they can.
- Set a regular lunch or dinner date with family or friends – once a month or once a week, or however often you want.
- If you find it hard to eat alone at home, eat in a different room or sit at a different spot at the table.



Many different bereavement services and supports are offered throughout the region. These include counselling; a variety of bereavement support groups, such as drop-in and walking groups; education; and referrals to other local resources and services.

For more information, contact the Champlain Hospice Palliative Care Program at 613-683-3779 or visit our website at www.champlainpalliative.ca.

You can also visit the Champlain Health Services directory at <http://www.champlainhealthline.ca/>

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I hate eating alone.



