

Pathways

through grief

...loneliness



Can humans die of broken hearts? According to researchers from Mayo Clinic, humans can die of broken hearts even though it is rare. Broken Heart Syndrome is diagnosed through EKGs, chest X-rays, and echocardiograms after a stressful event. Decreased functioning of the heart can be seen on tests even though there is no actual blockage.

A person may present at an ER with shortness of breath and chest pain due to stress chemicals being dumped into the

bloodstream. Patients may require hospitalization for a week or so, but the heart is not permanently damaged. People with Broken Heart Syndrome do recover to live productive lives.

After someone you love has died, you may have felt like your heart would break. So it is important to take care of yourself. Remember that, just as your physical heart heals with Broken Heart Syndrome, in time your heart will begin to heal after your loss.

“Sometimes I wish I were a little kid again; skinned knees are easier to fix than broken hearts.”

- Author unknown



Grief Pathway Outlook

Terrain:

Sharp curves, narrow, falling rocks, unmarked path, steep grade

Weather:

Cloudy, high winds;
80% chance of rain

Heartache Index:

High

Travel Tips:

- If friends seem to grieve and move on, leaving you to grieve alone, try to not take it personally.
- Loneliness is not healthy for you, so be proactive to initiate contact with friends and family. Ask a friend if it is all right to call when you really need to talk.
- Consider a bereavement support group with others who have experienced losses.
- Be creative to find ways to keep in touch with people through clubs, churches, coffee groups, or volunteering.
- Make plans to treat yourself to small things you enjoy, especially in the evenings or on weekends.
- Exercise can help combat depression. Invite a friend to walk with you.
- Nature can be healing—gentle breezes, sunshine, birdsongs, flowers, and squirrels or rabbits at play—and can help take your mind off your loneliness.
- Do small kindnesses for others – doing good is good for you!

The Hat

Several years ago following my husband's funeral, I was standing in front of the washing machine late one evening, ready to wash a load of clothes. The laundry soap and bleach were on a shelf above the dryer where my husband kept his well-worn navy "Wheat Grower's" ball cap.

I had not been able to get rid of it after his death. The hat was a reminder of how things used to be when my husband was still a part of my life. As I reached for the soap, I inadvertently knocked the cap onto the dryer and was instantly reminded that my husband was no longer there.

I was struck with the fact that he would never wear that ball cap again—he was gone forever, and he would never come back. The realization hit me with such force I could hardly breathe.

I was overcome with grief; I cried aloud, and my tears flowed, but there was no one in our old farmhouse to hear me cry, to see my tears, or put an arm around me and tell me it would be okay.

After his death, the house was empty when I arrived home from work—no one to welcome me home, to eat supper with, and no one to talk to. Life was changed forever, and loneliness set in.

For several weeks after his death, I regularly visited the cemetery. Then one spring day while I was there, I took a walk among the gravestones and began to read the names and dates of some of my older friends who had passed on.

What I observed startled me! After the first of a couple died, it was not long until their spouse also died, even though I did not recall hearing about the second being seriously ill. It made me wonder if grief could have been a factor in the death of the second person so soon after the first.

For me, that was a wakeup call. I was only 64 years old with the potential of more years to live. I began to read about how grief can affect one's health and began buying books



about grief.

Through my reading I found there are no magic formulas for getting through grief. But many of the things that are good for depression and overall good health are also good for grieving—things such as exercise, music, being with people, staying engaged in life, hope, and a new purpose for living.

I continued to work and I enrolled in a class. I walked almost every day. I kept little notebooks in handy places and wrote my thoughts. I chose to play happy music. I ate at a different place at the table. I added color to the walls in the house, I changed the furniture around. When I took action steps, my loneliness began to fade.

When I felt it was time to put away my husband's most personal belongings, I bought a tote and lovingly put them away. I am no hero; I am just an ordinary person who made a decision to try to live life well, to do the best I could. I made a deliberate decision to fight the loneliness, to reach toward the future, but I still cherish the past with my husband and will never forget him.

Adjusting to life without your loved one can be scary and lonely, but there is a purpose for your life. Do what you can to push back the loneliness, fight for a future, and put one foot in front of the other. And *don't quit walking*.

J. Dawn Rountree

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*“God grant me the serenity to accept the things
I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can,
and the wisdom to know the difference.”*