

Wise Widow

A Special Magazine for Widowed Women



You're Not Alone

First Things First

Take Your Time Nourish Yourself

A Widows Tale

A Fun-Filled, Day-Long Retreat!



Laughter, Stories, New Ideas, Fellowship and Food

Led by Donna Marie Todd
Widow and
Certified Grief Recovery Specialist®



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We know what it takes to move on and we're here to help you!

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Wise Widow is a free resource for widowed women from AWidowsTale.com. For more free resources, courses with phone support and podcasts about recovering your own health and renewing your life, visit us on-line:

AWidowsTale.com





You're Not Alone

*But it may feel
that way sometimes!*

The magazine you are reading, and all the resources available at AWidowsTale.com, were created *by widows for other widows*.

We know how it is. When the casseroles are gone and the cards stop coming, it feels as if the world stops. You feel numb, lost and alone. It seems like other people go about their business as if nothing happened; while you struggle to get up, make coffee and face the day. Welcome to widowhood and grief. No two people grieve the same way so we want to say this:

Don't let *anyone* tell you
how to grieve.

**Grief is an intensely
personal process!**

But while you are grieving, it can be really helpful to reach

out and get professional help.

While only you can navigate your own grief journey, grief counselors can guide you through the process and walk with you while you heal.

Our editor is a Certified Grief Recovery Specialist[®] and this magazine is designed to give you helpful information as you recover from your spouse's death. Now is the time to rebuild your own health and recover from the stress of your spouse's death.

We understand what it takes to move through grief, because we're all widows, too! We've designed everything we do (magazines, web courses and retreats) to support you as you recover from this devastating loss.

What If Crying Is Good For You?

When you were a child, crying came naturally. Crying as you grieve is good for you, because it's a very healthy way to process and release emotion.



As adults, we are often taught to stifle our emotions and you'll be tempted (even encouraged!) to “put on a brave face” as you grieve. But here's something you should know: If you try to stifle grief, it can delay your healing process!

Psychologists say that crying is a natural response that may have a biochemical purpose. Studies show that emotional crying releases negative substances like stress hormones and toxins from your body and floods your body with “feel-good” chemicals like oxytocin. This is why you may find that you feel better after a good cry!

Breaking into tears can be em-

barrassing but many psychologists believe that *not* expressing your emotions is dangerous over the long-term and may increase your risk of heart disease

HELP FOR GRIEF BURSTS

“Grief Bursts” are those explosions of emotion that come without warning and either leave you in tears or filled with red-in-the-face rage. It helps to set aside a specific time each day where you KNOW you will be alone and can process your grief. Find a special spot and outfit it with a journal, pen and tissues. Then at that specific time each day, journal about your feelings. This will free you to cry, sing, shout, and write your heart out. Honoring your grief at a set time each day will help you manage embarrassing grief bursts.

and hypertension. Honor yourself by setting aside time each day to process your feelings.



Walking Can Help You Fight Depression

When you are grieving, life hurts—walking can help!

“Can a few laps around the block actually solve your emotional problems? Probably not, but a regular exercise program might help. A review of studies stretching back to 1981 concluded that regular exercise can improve mood in people with mild to moderate depression. It also may play a supporting role in treating severe depression.”

Source: Harvard Medical School's
Online Health Publications

Walking is a free activity that can be done almost anywhere.

**Walking also protects you
against dementia,
peripheral artery disease,
obesity, diabetes, depression,
and colon cancer.**

We call that a great return on a modest investment in a good

pair of walking shoes and 20-30 minutes a day of your time!

While scientific research continues to extol the virtues of exercise to combat depression, *Time* magazine has reported that, “Antidepressant prescribing has risen nearly 400% since 1988, according to data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).” (October, 2011).

Your doctor may prescribe an antidepressant to help you as you grieve. If you decide to take an antidepressant, read about the benefits and risks of these medications.

Scientific evidence suggests exercise carries both a lower risk of detrimental side effects and a lower cost. Why haven't you heard about that? Well, there are no big dollar television ads

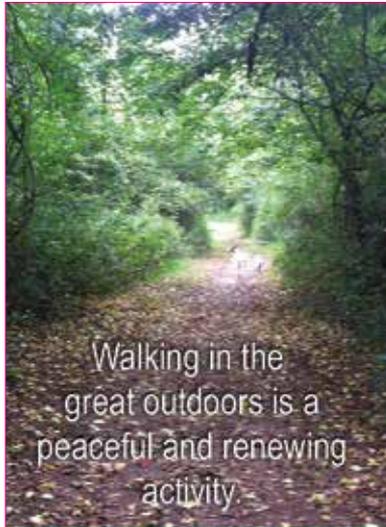
for exercise. And unfortunately, your physicians' face-time with you (the patient) is shorter than ever thanks to changes in insurance coverage for visits.

Insurers still largely reimburse doctors for each appointment—whatever that appointment may entail—rather than for curing a given patient. This means that your doctor may not be able to take the time to talk with you about how you are feeling since your spouse's death and discuss the benefits of an exercise program. Because antidepressant medications can have serious side-effects and carry a risk of addiction, do ask your doctor if they think an exercise program would work as well for you as medication.

A Duke University study found that exercise (like walking) may be just as effective as medication in combating depression and may be a better alternative for certain patients. While an-

tidessant medications have negative side-effects, the side-effects of a walking program are all very positive!

The leader of the Duke study, Dr. James Blumenthal, also feels that, "Patients who exercised may have felt a greater sense of mastery over their condition and gained a greater sense of accomplishment. They may have felt more self-confident and had better self-esteem because they were able to do it themselves, and they may have attributed their improvement to their ability to exercise."



There's a lot to be said for taking that first step as a widow and doing something proactive to make yourself and your health situation better. Taking care of yourself is so important now!

So, when is the right time to try a walking program? Now is a great time to start exercising. Some people

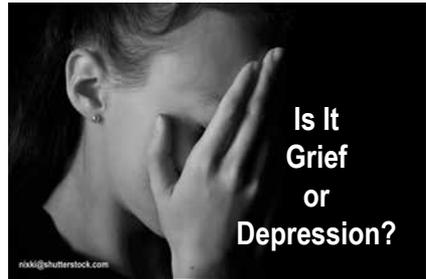
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think they need to wait until they somehow generate enough willpower to exercise. But waiting for willpower or motivation to exercise is a passive approach, and when someone has depression and is unmotivated, waiting passively for change is unlikely to help at all. Focusing on a lack of motivation and willpower can make you feel like a failure. Instead, identify your strengths and skills and apply those to taking some first steps toward exercise.

How does walking help combat depression? Some research indicates that walking enhances the action of endorphins—chemicals that improve natural immunity, reduce the perception of pain and improve mood. Another theory is that exercise stimulates the body’s production of neurotransmitters, like norepinephrine, and this may also improve mood. Situational depression is a known side-effect of grief but walking can help you feel better!

*Walking briskly for 20-30 minutes a day can help you combat your grief-related depression.**

*Always talk to your doctor before beginning a new exercise program.



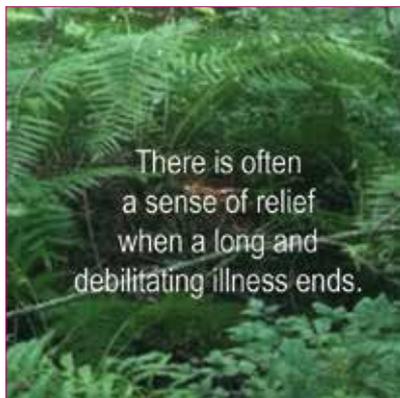
Situational depression is a side-effect of grief that is normal and experienced by most widows. It is not the same as clinical depression. Unresolved grief can lead to depression.

Grief is a multi-faceted response to loss, particularly to the loss of someone to whom we have formed a bond. Although conventionally focused on the emotional response to loss, it also has physical, cognitive, behavioral, social, and philosophical dimensions.

Depression is a state of feeling sad **that is not related to a particular loss**. It is a disorder marked especially by sadness, inactivity, difficulty in thinking and concentration, a significant increase or decrease in appetite and time spent sleeping, feelings of dejection and hopelessness and sometimes suicidal tendencies.



Experiencing the death of your spouse challenges you on every level. Physically, you may have lost many hours (or even days) of sleep and neglected self-care routines. Emotionally, your strongest tie has been broken and it will take time and attention to recover from that. You never really “get over” the death, you just learn to live with it. Spiritually, you may find yourself shaken to the core by the process of death while at the same time aware of new reserves of strength and perhaps even an unexpected peacefulness. There is often a sense of relief when a long and debilitating illness ends. Do not criticize



yourself for these feelings; it was hard on both of you!

The stress of the illness or accident and then the subsequent death has put enormous stress

on your immune system. Rebuilding your own health—physically, emotionally and spiritually is the single most important thing you can do right now. If you have dependent children living with you, this adds

even more stress to your life. Taking care of yourself will let you take better care of them.

Other things can wait. **Let your health, your renewal and the rebuilding of your life be your top priority now.**



When you are grieving, it can be hard to take good care of yourself but frankly, it's never been more important! Your system has been under tremendous stress. Being widowed is one of the hardest life changes to navigate.

**What you feed
yourself
is critical
to your recovery.**

You may find that cooking for one is a very depressing activity. It just doesn't seem right and to make matters worse, there aren't many recipes made for one. (Let us recommend *The Pleasures of Cooking for One* cookbook by Judith Jones. It's available on Amazon.com for about \$20.)

Good nutrition is essential to the rebuilding of your health

and immune system. Plus, certain fruits and vegetables can actually help combat your grief-related (or situational) depression.

Joel Fuhrman, MD, the author of *Eat to Live* and *The End of Dieting*, recommends that your main meal be a salad. That's right: a salad. Why? Because dark, leafy greens carry the most nutrients per calorie consumed. Also, salads are inexpensive, very easy to shop for, and quick to put together whenever you feel hungry.

After you shop for fresh veggies and salad greens we recommend washing your produce when you arrive home and prepping your vegetables for the salad. Having the vegetables ready to put on your salad makes mealtime a more pleasant activity. If you want extra

protein, purchase canned beans, cooked chicken or cans of tuna to top off your salad. Salads are nutrition powerhouses when they are combined with a low-fat dressing.



A bowl of fresh fruit is a great way to start your day with a vitamin boost. Top it with a spoonful of yogurt for the probiotics that help your intestinal flora thrive. A healthy gut makes for a healthy you!

It's also important to drink lots of water as you recover. Water helps your body purify itself from the toxic

hormones that were released during stressful times. Drinking enough water can be challenging, though. Try adding slices of fresh citrus and a few drops of stevia, a natural plant sweetener available in health food stores. This will turn a simple glass of water into a refreshing homemade lemonade or limeade. Plus, lemons and limes are high in vitamin C, which protects you against infections and helps your body neutralize harmful free radicals and toxins.

We know that no recipe or colorful fruit can make eating alone any easier.

Lonely feelings naturally arise at mealtimes now. But it will be helpful to focus on how you are rebuilding your own health with this nutritious and colorful food that's easy to shop for, fast to prepare and easy to enjoy.





The nutrients in these “super foods” help repair your immune system and stabilize the moods swings you may be experiencing as you grieve.

Dark, leafy greens like spinach, kale and swiss chard have the highest nutrient density per calorie.

Walnuts are one of the richest plant-based sources of omega-3 fatty acids. (Numerous studies have demonstrated how omega-3 fatty acids support brain function and reduce depression symptoms!)

Avocado contains mostly mono-saturated fat as oleic acid, 4 grams of protein, vitamin K, vitamin B (B-9, B-6, and B-5), vitamin C, and vitamin E-12 and 11 grams of dietary fiber.

Berries (blueberries, raspberries, strawberries, and blackberries) have very high levels of antioxidants, which repair your cells.

Mushrooms have chemical properties that oppose insulin, which helps lower blood sugar levels and evens out your mood. They also promote healthy gut bacteria which strengthens your immune system.

Onions (which includes garlic, leeks, chives, shallots and spring onions) decrease your risk of several cancers, some studies show.

Tomatoes contain lots of folic acid and alpha-lipoic acid, both of which are good for fighting depression. Tomatoes are a “happy” food!

Beans are slow to digest, which stabilizes blood sugar levels.

Seeds are rich in omega-3 fatty acids. Seeds add their own spectrum of unique disease-fighting substances to the dietary landscape, and the fat in seeds increases the absorption of protective nutrients in vegetables eaten at the same meal.

Apples are high in antioxidants. They can help to prevent and repair oxidation damage and inflammation on the cellular level. They are also full of soluble fiber, which balances blood sugar swings for better mood control.

Help Yourself Heal with Healthy Food!

Grief Rituals

It is wise to just, “Let your grief happen.” If you try to suppress it, you only delay your own healing and subject yourself to further emotional and immune system stress. And really, haven’t you had enough stress?

Choosing and using a grief ritual helps with the bereavement process. Here are two rituals that many widows we work with have found very effective.

JOURNALING. Journaling lets you explore your feelings about the loss. Journaling is most useful when it is done every day. It serves as a record of what you are going through. If you go back and review what

you’ve written at the end of each month, you will see how you are progressing through the grief process. Since grief often feels never-ending and hopelessness abounds, journal review is an especially useful practice.

GRIEF CONTAINER.

A “grief container” is particularly helpful if you have to go back to work soon after his death. With this ritual you set aside a sacred time each day (preferably after work) when you know you will spend twenty minutes or so actively grieving. Find a comfortable, private space where you can sit for 15-20 minutes each day and process the feelings that may arise. This ritual helps you manage your emotions by creating a safe place and time to grieve.



Remember that grieving does not always involve tears. You might meditate on a sweet memory, listen to a special song or practice gratitude for the life that is still yours to live!

Online Course for Widows

Your journey through widowhood will be as unique as you are. But with a membership in AWidowsTale.com, you won't have to face it alone.



Membership in AWidowsTale gives you access to our online widows' recovery course. Each week for six weeks, you will receive a new resource designed to help you cope with the unique challenges of widowhood. These inspiring and useful resources are delivered

right to your email in-box, and you can access them anytime, at your convenience! There's no meeting to get to—it's ready when you are. AWidowsTale memberships are affordable and all of the video, audio and print resources are designed to help you navigate widowhood.

Membership gives you:

Weekly recovery resources

Unlimited access to our private FaceBook page, where you can meet and converse with other widowed women.

Two, private phone support sessions.*

**Two one-half hour sessions are included with membership; additional time is available.*

Don't wait, join us on-line today!

AWidowsTale.com
RENEW, RESTORE
REBUILD



Finding Pleasure in the Simple Things Again

There are so many things that you miss: Starting your day with coffee, visiting friends, going out for a meal together, taking a trip to a favorite vacation spot. The list goes on and on.

Some things will simply never be quite the same. Even if you find another love (lucky you!) and remarry, it is never the same. What you shared together as a couple is gone and that's hard. In fact, that's one of the hardest things about widowhood: The everyday, little things of life keep the pain of loss alive.

But you can still find pleasure in life. In fact, it's really important that you do this! Here are some simple pleasures other widows have used to bring joy back into their lives! Here are three ideas we like!

1. Bake Cookies for a Kid.

Cookies are a universal symbol of happiness. They fill your home with a warm and comforting aroma and they are great with a cup of tea or coffee. Keep a few for yourself and then give the rest to a child—that way you won't be tempted to overeat and you can share joy. Sharing joy will bring you joy!

2. Form a widow's circle with one, two or three other widows and go out for a meal together. It's amazing how conversation with other women who "get it" helps you make sense of what you're feeling.

3. Volunteer at an animal shelter or food pantry. You'll quickly discover that you are not the only one having a hard time right now.

Helping others gives you a healthy perspective on your life.



You have undergone a tremendous and life-changing loss. ***But you are not alone.*** Many other women in your community are also widowed. You can help bring healing, understanding, new ideas and support to the widows in your community with A Widows Tale Retreat.

Help Bring A Retreat to Your Area! Churches, civic groups, hospitals and medical groups can sponsor this retreat for the widowed women of their community. Learn more at AWidowsTale.com
“Sponsor a Retreat”



What Are the Benefits of A Widows Tale Retreat?

We create a sacred space where your stories of loss are honored. You'll learn new ways to recover from grief and develop a solid strategy for rebuilding your life. You'll play and have fun. You'll receive the love and encouragement of other widowed women.

You will learn how to support each other!

“Excellent and empowering!” Cappy

“What I liked was not only the sharing with other widows, which is SO wonderful, but also receiving the expertise of a widow leader. Go!” Susan

“It's so much fun!!” Leslie

A Widows Tale retreat is an enlightening, one-day event filled with laughter, fellowship, stories, great ideas, practical exercises and wonderful food!

Visit AWidowsTale.com/retreats
to learn how to bring a retreat to your area.