

Infertility and Grief

Patients dealing with infertility may have invisible losses and sorrows. There is no physical sign of the loss, no pregnancy, no child, and no public event to grieve the loss. The loss of fertility can become a very private pain. Family and friends may not understand the grief caused by your infertility.

Grief is a natural reaction to any change or loss. Common grief reactions related to infertility may affect other areas of your life. Everyone grieves in their own way and at their own pace. There is no normal “timeline” for grieving. It is important to be patient with yourself and to seek help when you need it.

It is common for grief reactions to return before or during special events, such as gender reveal parties, baby showers, holidays, birthdays, Mother’s Day, Father’s Day, and family reunions. You may also have grief reactions before other important times, such as the date you learned of your cancer diagnosis or when you were told of your infertility status.

Feelings of loss caused by infertility may include:

- The ability to have children
- Dreams, hopes, and plans for a traditional family
- Life meaning and purpose
- Financial security
- Sense of certainty
- Control over future goals
- Purpose of sexuality

This handout is for informational purposes only. Talk with your doctor or health care team if you have any questions about your care.

People grieving the loss of their infertility may have:

- **Emotional pain** - You may feel uncertain about your fertility status. It is also common to feel anger, sadness, anxiety, numbness, disbelief, shame, resentment, helplessness, regret, guilt, misunderstood, and depression. At times, your feelings of loss may be intense.
- **Thinking reactions** - You may doubt your decisions or feel uncertain about the “right” procedure or treatment option. You may find it hard to focus and make decisions.
- **Spirituality questions** - You may begin to see life differently and question your life values, beliefs, priorities, and your life’s purpose and meaning.
- **Physical/Behavioral reactions** - Grief often makes a person feel tired and may cause changes with your appetite, sleeping, motivation, and sexual desires. You may also have periods of unexpected crying.
- **Social reactions** - You may have changes in your marriage/partnership, sexuality and other relationships. You may feel others do not understand what you are going through. You may also find it hard to handle times when people say or do something you feel is insensitive.
- **Personal reactions** - You may have changes in how you see yourself as a woman or man and re-define the traditional view of marriage/partnership, sexuality and family.

Ways to take care of yourself when grieving:

- Give yourself time to grieve your loss(es). Be aware of your feelings and find ways to express your emotions.
- You may find it helpful to talk to others about your feelings or share your thoughts and emotions through writing, music, artwork or movement.
- Balance your time alone and time with others. Seek and accept positive support from family and friends.
- Ask your health care team or a mental health professional for resources to help you adjust and cope with your loss.
- Learn what is helpful to you and let others know how they can support you.

- Learn the things that may trigger your grief and make plans for what you want to do, or not do, during these times.
- Honor your limits. It is okay to change your plans, even at the last minute, if you feel it will be too hard for you. You may find it helpful to keep track of what actions helped you during these times, so you can look at the list when something triggers your grief.
- Remind yourself that it is normal for your grief reactions to return before or during special events.
- Stay away from unhealthy coping activities such as the use of alcohol/ drugs, overeating, overworking, isolating yourself or self-defeating thinking and actions.
- Take care of yourself by getting plenty of rest, exercise and eating a healthy diet. Maintain your routines and set simple goals for yourself.
- Find things that give you comfort such as meditation, exercise, yoga, massage, prayer, reading, music, gardening, being in nature, writing, photography, artwork or hobbies. You may also find it helpful to talk with others who share your experience.
- Be open to new ways of coping or looking at things from a different point of view.