



# Dealing With Grief and Depression

by Omal Bani Saberi, LCSW, CCHT

**W**hen a part of our body is lost, we experience a grieving process that is not easy. Emotional recovery, like physical recovery, is based on your own timetable and other factors. These include: age, gender, circumstances of your limb loss (accident, disease, birth), how you coped with problems in your life before your limb loss, support or lack of support from family or friends, cultural values and norms, and socioeconomic factors.

The new amputee may experience feelings of depression that are difficult to ward off. What are these feelings, and how can you work through them?

## *Signs & Symptoms of Depression*

- Loss of appetite, changes in eating patterns
- Lack of energy
- Sleeplessness or sleeping more than usual
- Poor concentration
- Loss of interest in enjoyable activities

- Loss of interest in sex
- Social withdrawal
- Feelings of hopelessness, worthlessness, or inappropriate guilt
- Emotions that are flat – expressed robotically – rather than with feeling

## *Surviving Depression*

Following are some suggestions for overcoming your depression, physically, emotionally, mentally and spiritually.

### **Physically**

1. **Get your rest.** Be sure to get out of bed, get dressed, and, if possible, go out of the house.
2. **Make sure you eat well** – not too many sweets. Foods with sugar will give you quick bursts of energy then quickly let you down, taking you deeper into depression.

**3. Get involved in physical and recreational activities that do not cause you pain.** Exercise and gentle movement help decrease depression.

**4. Practice deep breathing.** This helps to relax muscles, decrease pain, and relax and focus the mind.

**5. Decrease alcoholic beverage intake.** Alcohol is a depressant. Eliminate other drugs that you use to self-medicate. If using prescription drugs, make sure you take them when prescribed.

**6. Emphasize your best features; don't focus on the loss.** For example, if you have beautiful skin or eyes, a bright smile, a terrific figure or a great personality, this is the time to value your assets.

### **Emotionally**

**1. You are not alone.**

**2. You are not to blame.** It is important that you feel the anger, because if you don't, it will lead to depression.

**3. Write letters and don't mail them.** Journal your feelings.

**4. Increase contact with supportive family and friends.**

**5. Assert yourself and communicate clearly.** Tell those around you what you need and don't need. For example, you

may need to expend less energy this year; conserve your energy. Go to a movie or rent a video, especially if the weather is harsh.

**6. Tell your loved ones you are experiencing grief and talk honestly about your loss together.** This gives your loved ones the chance to express their feelings, since they too have to adjust to your loss.



**7. Remember, people want to help but often don't know what to do to support you.** So ask, ask, ask! You can still remain independent. Allow others to give to you, so you can replenish your energy.

**8. Explore meditation, guided imagery and hypnotherapy.**

**9. Contact a support group.** Contact the ACA office toll-free at 888/267-5669 for help in locating a support group or joining ACA's online support group.

**10. Laughter is a healer of depression, so add humor.**

**11. Get professional help if the depression becomes overwhelming and no small changes are**

**occurring.** Everyone needs help at some point in his or her life. You are worth it. If finances are a problem, call your local mental health office or the ACA at 888/267-5669 for information on financial resources.

**12. Most importantly, know that these feelings will lessen over time; however, for now, get support!**

## Mentally

1. **Commit yourself to work with the medical staff, even when you don't want to.**
2. **Do not make big decisions such as beginning or ending a relationship, or buying or selling a house or car, when you are depressed.**
3. **Go to a mental health professional for evaluation and medication if necessary.**
4. **Seek alternative medicine, massage, acupressure, acupuncture and hypnotherapy for pain management, phantom pain, sleeplessness, anxiety and depression.**
5. **Replace negative self-talk about your body and life with positive messages.**

## Spiritually

1. **Forgive yourself; don't judge.** Dr. Harold H. Bloomfield, co-author of *How to Heal Depression*, states, "The primary reason to forgive is for your peace of mind



and the quality of all your future relationships. That's what we do when we forgive — let go of the imaginary (but painful) control of the way we think things could be, and we untie ourselves from the burden of judging the way they are."

## 2. Learn to think of yourself in a different way.

- Keep your dreams and create a new definition of success.
- Accept support from loved ones while remaining independent.
- Make new traditions and memories, creating hope for the present and future. Make goals and objectives for the future and start small.
- If your religion or spirituality is important to you, become more involved with it.

## Summary

Amputation is an enormous loss and learning to adjust is a process that takes time — so be gentle with yourself. Try not to isolate yourself or withdraw from people; use your experiences to build new memories and start new traditions to reach your goals. Sure, there will be adjustments along the road to success — but it is still your path. Who you are has not changed. Always remember, you are much more than your physical experience. ❖

## Resources

National Mental Health Association  
2001 N. Beauregard Street, 12th Floor  
Alexandria, VA 22311  
800/969-6642  
[www.nmha.org](http://www.nmha.org)

Directory of community mental health services  
[www.nmha.org/affiliates/directory/index.cfm](http://www.nmha.org/affiliates/directory/index.cfm)

## *Coping With Limb Loss*

Ellen Winchell, PhD  
Available through ACA (888/267-5669)