

5 Tips

GOING TO THE DOCTOR

after loss

1. Find a provider.

If you didn't like your provider before your person's death, now is the time to switch to someone new. More than ever you need someone who understands your needs and communicates in ways that are meaningful to you. The search can feel overwhelming, so ask a friend for a recommendation. People love to talk about the doctors who care for them well.

2. Schedule a post-loss visit.

If you have concerns about your own mortality, schedule a reassurance assessment. Doctors regularly offer this kind of care to bereaved people. You're not the first patient who has worried he'll have a heart attack or die of cancer after having watched his loved one die. You're not the first individual who has been concerned about what the stress of grief is doing to his body. A basic physical can offer a baseline assessment of your health post-loss and provide you with reassurance. Your doctor can also recommend healthy practices and connect you to mental health services that will help you process your grief.

3. Don't avoid your symptoms.

If you're struggling mentally or physically, let your doctor know. Early intervention produces the best results. Grief wears you down, but you don't need to simply accept feeling miserable physically. If something hurts, ask for help.

4. Start slowly.

Going to the doctor after loss can be scary. But you don't need to do it all at once. Start with a telehealth visit that you can do from the comfort of your home. Remind yourself that this first step shows lots of courage. Next, schedule a time in your day to drive over to the doctor's office and just sit parked in the parking lot. Watch the cars driving in and out. Repeat a phrase like, "I am uncomfortable, but I am safe" or "This step is taking me to where I want to be" or "I am choosing to take care of my body" to remind yourself that even showing up in the parking lot is brave.

When you're ready, call the doctor to schedule your appointment. Ask them to mark your chart as a bereaved person and let them know you're anxious about the upcoming visit.

5. Advocate for yourself.

Your first steps of appointment setting are a practice run in advocating for yourself. You can continue to build those muscles by writing out a list of your questions in advance. As you become confident in talking with your doctor, you'll find you're more able to articulate what you need, insist on the care you desire, and pursue answers that put your mind at ease. From seeking out a provider who treats you as a whole person to showing up in the office, you are showing you can know and do what is right for you.

This content does not constitute medical advice or replace the assessment of a doctor or mental health professional. If you have questions about your health, please consult your doctor.

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