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Sleep Disorders during our Grief Journeys of All Our Children

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Many bereaved parents who have endured or are enduring the deaths of all their children find it difficult to sleep. Rest is vitally important on our grief journeys as we are susceptible to fatigue, illnesses, difficulty with memory and completing daily chores.

Not only do we no longer have our children with us on this earth, but we are unable to eat, sleep or function for a much longer time than we prefer. Grief affects us emotionally, mentally, physically, psychologically, spiritually and socially. Nothing is the same and we must create new memories and relationships, maintain a job, protect ourselves, educate others on how to assist us – all while doing our intense grief work.

We are either so exhausted that we sleep all the time or we are incapable of getting a few hours of rest in a 24-hour period. We may find our sleep interrupted with sobbing, crying, nightmares, dreams and unpleasant night sweats.

There are a few tools we can use to help us get the necessary hours of rest that we need during those first months and years of intense grief.

Several have found that yoga, or some other type of exercise or relaxation during the day, will help us to sleep better at night. A brisk walk is good for our bodies when we no longer care about taking care of ourselves.

Eating early evening meals helps the digestive system rather than eating just before bed. Try an herbal tea, like Sleepy Time, which stimulates the melatonin in our brains and promotes relaxation. Consult your physician as to what you might use, something non-habit forming.

Many of us have found that avoiding alcoholic beverages or anything containing caffeine after lunch is helpful as these stimulants tend to keep us awake.

Some of us have found that getting a good massage once a week helps our muscles to relax – muscles that have tightened because of our loss. Others find that listening to soothing music just before bed is relaxing.

It is often unwise to watch movies and TV or read material that contains violence. Anything that negatively stimulates our minds/souls should be avoided during grief, especially the evening hours. Reading a humorous book or watching a funny movie can help put us in a restful state before bed.

Meditation and prayer have also helped many bereaved parents to relax. Also, keep your room darkened as bright lights or lights from a clock, radio or electronic device may keep you awake.

If you are unable to sleep after trying these suggestions, you may want to consult your medical professionals.

Sleep, and most importantly rest, is vital to each of us as we navigate this road of grief. It is a long, arduous journey so anything we can do to lighten our “baggage” will strengthen our resolve so we can navigate this difficult path before us.