

## GRIEF

The long dark nights of winter can mirror our emotions and make some of them overwhelming – especially grief.

### What is grief?

- Grief is a mental suffering or distress caused by loss of something we value – a person, pet, job.
- It can also be caused by the loss of something intangible – freedom, dreams.

### Who experiences grief?

- Anybody who has had a loss can experience grief – children, teenagers or adults.
- Carers or supporters of people who have a chronic illness, disability or who simply have a reduced ability to take care of themselves, such as an aged person are often forgotten. They may experience grief twice: initially due to their loss of freedom or lifestyle when they suddenly required to take up the role and then again when the person dies.

### The Symptoms of Grief

- The main symptom is intense sorrow or sadness.
- There may also be changes in sleep – a need for more sleep or insomnia
- Appetite changes are also common – reduced or increased appetite or craving for energy rich foods
- Chinese medicine links grief with the lungs and interestingly, respiratory conditions such as colds are common during grief.

### The Process of Grief

- It is generally accepted there are five stages of grief: denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance but this is not a linear process – people may skip or repeat steps.
- People don't "get over" grief but learn to manage the loss.
- This has no time frame – often takes years and even then, events or people can trigger re-emergence of grief years or even decades later

### What can You do to Manage the Loss?

- Allow yourself to grieve – crying, feeling the pain of loss is part of the process. There are no shortcuts to feeling better.
- Talk to the person you have lost or write a letter – tell them what you are feeling, that you miss them and anything else you'd like to say to them.
- Maintaining a healthy lifestyle is important. Eat a balanced diet, don't drink too much alcohol or take illicit drugs. If sugar cravings, limit these to a snack or treat.
- Exercise is important – even going for a short walk each day.
- Relaxation can help to calm your mind, release muscle tension and regulate your breathing.
- Connect with other people – often you don't want to meet friends or family but don't totally isolate yourself. Sharing a hug can be very therapeutic! If you don't want to talk to anyone, consider a massage.
- Acupuncture is also great for grief and many of the symptoms such as sleep or appetite changes.

### What if this Doesn't help?

- If grief is interfering in your daily life despite trying these things see a doctor – you may need a referral to a counsellor or medication to help manage your loss.