



Grief after suicide loss is not only an emotional experience; it is a physical one that does not end when the early weeks of shock pass. This handout covers what the body carries across months and years, and what helps. You can bring it to a doctor's appointment to help explain what you have been experiencing.

What the Body Carries Across Phases

- The nervous system can tip in either direction after traumatic loss. Some survivors feel wired, sleepless, and anxious; others feel collapsed, flat, and unable to move. Both are genuine trauma responses, and both are common after suicide loss.
- A [peer-reviewed systematic review](#) found that suicide-bereaved parents had elevated risks of cardiovascular disease, hypertension, and diabetes in the years following the loss. A separate long-term study found that depression severity in the grief months predicted physical health decline years later.
- The body's stress response can also shift over time. Survivors who were anxious and wired in year one sometimes become severely fatigued, emotionally flat, and unable to generate motivation in years two or three. This is a different phase of the same load, not an improvement, and it deserves the same attention.

What Survivors Often Stop Doing

- Exercise, sleep routines, and intentional eating are typically the first habits to go. The nervous system under chronic trauma load is managing threat and survival, not wellness; expecting it to maintain ordinary health habits is expecting two different people out of the same body.
- Alcohol suppresses REM sleep and deepens the emotional floor grief already lowers. Reducing use after regular reliance can temporarily worsen sleep and intensify intrusive thoughts; this rebound is expected and passes. See the [post on insomnia after suicide loss](#).
- Chronic stress changes how the body metabolizes medication. Prescriptions that were working well before the loss may need reassessment. Do not adjust or stop medications on your own; speak with your prescribing physician about what has changed.

Getting Back to the Body

- Sleep is the first domino. CBT-I (Cognitive Behavioral Therapy for Insomnia) and Image Rehearsal Therapy for trauma nightmares are real clinical tools worth asking about. Tell your doctor the full truth: not just that there was a death, but that the person died by suicide and the grief has been sustained.
- Gentle movement is the clinical recommendation, not a lowered bar. Movement that pushes the nervous system past its tolerance threshold backfires. Ten minutes outside, a walk around the block; these signal safety to a system still running a trauma response. Body-based therapies like Somatic Experiencing and EMDR can also address the physical residue of trauma. See the [guide to finding a grief counselor](#).
- Survivors who stay connected to others and find ways to use their loss in service of others tend to carry it differently in their bodies over time. Research on bereaved parents shows that meaning-making activity is associated with measurably lower inflammatory markers. Peer support and connection are part of physical health, not separate from it.

For Those Supporting a Grieving Person

- Supporters who lost the same person are also survivors. Hypervigilance about a bereaved person's health is itself a trauma response rooted in love, and the care you offer someone else does not replace the care you may need yourself.
- Signs worth a caring conversation: significant weight change continuing over months, sleep disruption still severe past six months, increasing reliance on alcohol, withdrawal from all social contact, or a pattern of avoiding medical care. The [Alliance of Hope](#) offers guidance for supporters on what sustained grief looks like.
- One non-pressuring question works better than repeated concern. Try: "I have noticed you seem really worn down lately. When did you last see your doctor?" Plant the seed once, with care, and let the person respond in their own time.

Source

<https://sunflowersaftersuicide.com/long-term-physical-health-after-suicide-loss/>