



Anticipatory Grief - Symptoms and How To Cope

Mental Health; ClevelandClinic.org; April 9, 2024

(Editor – I adapted this article to patients suffering from peripheral neuropathy)

Grief. We'll all experience it at some point. But there may be times in your life when you're expecting to feel grief years or months before it even happens. Known as anticipatory grief, it's a coping mechanism to help us prepare for a loss like receiving a new diagnosis of peripheral neuropathy or the disability that could occur with the progression of peripheral neuropathy.

What Is Anticipatory Grief?

"It's a collection of symptoms — cognitive, behavioral, emotional — that we experience in anticipation of an impending loss," explains Dr. Josell. "We most commonly associate anticipatory grief with somebody who is very ill or dying — either one's own impending death or a loved one. But it can also be in reference to other types of losses such as an illness or a forced job change."

How is anticipatory grief different from traditional or conventional grief? Conventional grief happens after the loss — it's a reaction to the loss, whereas anticipatory grief is considering what is to come. It's thinking about what's going to happen as opposed to reacting to something that has already happened.

Anticipatory grief can have benefits. It can help prepare somebody for the grief when it actually happens. Anticipatory grief can help you face your fears rather than avoid them, with the hope that you can navigate your grief when the loss occurs.

Symptoms Of Anticipatory Grief

Anticipatory grief is like a snowflake — no two people's symptoms are exactly the same. Common anticipatory grief symptoms include:

- Overwhelming emotions such as sadness, anger and loneliness.
- Difficulty sleeping.
- Loss of appetite.
- Difficulty concentrating.
- Being preoccupied and replaying different scenarios in your head.
- Withdrawal from others.

How To Deal With Anticipatory Grief

Dr. Josell says it's important to start off by normalizing the experience of anticipatory grief. "It's normal for people to anticipate loss and to have a reaction to an impending negative experience," she says. Here's how to cope with anticipatory grief:

- **Talk about what you're going through.** Don't hesitate to share and talk with other people about what you're feeling. "When we think that we're unique and the only person who's ever experienced something, it makes everything worse," says Dr. Josell. "Talking with other people who have been through a similar experience or have had similar

kinds of symptoms can be very helpful.” *(Editor – attend peripheral neuropathy support groups to share what you are experiencing. Many of us have had the same experiences.)*

- **Feel your emotions.** You may have been taught to ignore your emotions — don’t let people see you cry or become upset. But that’s not a healthy way to deal with your emotions, says Dr. Josell. “We get the message to push those emotions down, that they’re not good, they’re not healthy,” she explains. “But what happens is your emotions burst out another way.” Your emotions can manifest in overeating or even turning to alcohol and drugs. So, feel what you feel. “When we let ourselves feel it, those emotions tend to dissipate a lot more quickly than if we try to hold them back or ignore them.”
- **Take care of yourself.** Practice self-care often. “When we’re not in a good place, we stop taking care of ourselves,” notes Dr. Josell. “Make sure you focus on sleep and a healthy diet, while making an effort to move your body, drink plenty of water and being around other people that make you happy.”
- **Education yourself.** Learn about this disease. This will help you understand what is happening to you by knowing what the words mean that are used to describe peripheral neuropathy. Use our website at www.pnhelp.org to learn about neuropathy symptoms, peripheral nerves, and conventional and alternative treatments. *(bullet point added by Editor)*

It’s important to remember that grief — whether anticipatory or traditional — is normal. If you love someone or are happy to have something in your life, you are going to experience a loss, i.e. grief, when it is missing. You may feel sad, angry and depressed even thinking about that loss. Following the above advice will give you some control over your grief.