

When to Consider Medication

I feel so depressed, do I need medication?

Some people who experience significant loss do become clinically depressed. The percentage is small, but it does happen. There are times that people may need medication.

Normal grief can be so intense that doctors frequently prescribe antidepressants for it. This is not always appropriate, as medication can interfere with the very normal process of grieving. In some circumstances, drug therapy may improve coping when it is just enough to ease the stress of grief, but does not interfere with your normal emotions and functions. (For example, good rest is necessary for adequate functioning. Medication to help your sleep can be very helpful for a short period of time.) But remember, it is not in your best interest to use drugs that suppress your natural response to loss.

Following is a list of normal grief reactions contrasted with clinical depression. If you have concerns about whether you need drug therapy or not, talk it over with your doctor or counselor. You might find it helpful to print out these distinctions and take them with you when you see your health care professional.

Normal Grief

- Responds to comfort and support
- Often openly angry
- Relates depressed feelings to loss
- Can still experience moments of enjoyment in life
- Exhibits feelings of sadness and emptiness
- May have transient physical complaints
- Expresses guilt over some specific aspect of the loss
- Experiences temporary impact upon self-esteem

Clinical Depression

- Does not accept support
- Irritable and may complain but does not directly express anger
- Exhibits an all pervading sense of doom
- Projects a sense of hopelessness and chronic emptiness
- Has chronic physical complaints
- Has generalized feelings of guilt
- Loss of self-esteem is of greater duration

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