

Serenity



A newsletter for our donor families

QUARTER 1 • 2022

Hope for the Heart

Midwest Transplant Network invites you to participate in this year's virtual Hope for the Heart video tribute. The video will feature photos of you and/or your family holding a homemade cutout of a heart with your loved one's name written on it. When making your heart, you can be as creative or simple as you want with the design. Please send your photo to photos@mwtn.org by **Friday, Feb. 18**. The video tribute will be published on **Thursday, Feb. 24**. 

 [View the video tribute on MTN's YouTube channel: youtube.com/midwesttransplantnetwork](https://www.youtube.com/midwesttransplantnetwork)

Rose Parade

Since 2004, the Donate Life Rose Parade® float has inspired people across the country to save and heal lives with the powerful message of organ, eye and tissue donation. This year, the Donate Life float featured a memorial floral portrait of Midwest Transplant Network's honoree, Christopher Hutson Jr, as well as many other donor heroes from around the U.S. Christopher's life was tragically ended by an enraged driver two weeks after he celebrated his 19th birthday. Just four months before his untimely death, Christopher registered as an organ donor, which allowed him to save the lives of seven others.

The 2022 Donate Life Rose Parade float, "Courage to Hope," shared the courage shown by donor families, living donors and waiting recipients, represented by the winged lion of Piazza San Marco in Venice, Italy. The lion holds a book representing the knowledge donor families and recipients share about the importance of saying "yes" to donation. Organ, eye and tissue donation offers hope to donor families — who, in the midst of losing a loved one, can believe their loved one's gifts will help save others. At the same time, those waiting to receive a lifesaving organ have the courage to hope that a donor will restore their health and change their lives. 

In This Issue

Our quarterly newsletter features inspirational stories of organ, eye and tissue donors as well as resources for Midwest Transplant Network's donor families.

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**MIDWEST
TRANSPLANT
NETWORK**

How Grief Shows Up in Your Body

Adapted from "What's Your Grief"

It's surprising how physical grief can be. Your heart literally aches. A memory comes up that causes your stomach to clench or a chill to run down your spine. Some nights, your mind races, and your heart races along with it, your body so electrified with energy that you can barely sleep. Other nights, you're so tired that you fall asleep right away. You wake up the next morning still feeling exhausted and spend most of the day in bed.

What causes these physical symptoms? A range of studies reveals the powerful effects grief can have on the body. Grief increases inflammation, which can worsen health problems you already have and cause new ones. It batters the immune system, leaving you depleted and vulnerable to infection. The heartbreak of grief can increase blood pressure and the risk of blood clots. Intense grief can alter the heart muscle so much that it causes "broken heart syndrome," a form of heart disease with the same symptoms as a heart attack.

Stress links the emotional and physical aspects of grief. The systems in the body that process physical and emotional stress overlap, and emotional stress can activate the nervous system as easily as physical threats can. When stress becomes chronic, increased adrenaline and blood pressure can contribute to chronic medical conditions.

How does avoidance harm your health?

Research shows that rumination, or repetitive, negative, self-focused thought, is actually a way to avoid problems. People who ruminate shift attention away from painful truths by focusing on negative material that is less threatening than the truths they want to avoid. This pattern of thinking is strongly associated with depression.

Rumination and other forms of avoidance demand energy and block the natural abilities of the body and mind to integrate new realities and heal. Research by Margaret Stroebe and others shows that avoidance behavior makes depression, complicated grief and the physical health problems that go with them more likely. Efforts to avoid the reality of loss can cause fatigue, weaken your immune system, increase inflammation and prolong other ailments.

How do role adjustments affect your health?

When someone close to you dies, your social role changes, too. This can affect your sense of meaning and sense of self. Caregivers face especially complicated role adjustments. The physical and emotional demands of caregiving can leave them feeling depleted even before a loved one dies, and losing the person they took care of can leave them with a lost sense of purpose.

It can be hard to make life work again after a close family member dies. Losing a partner can mean having to move out of a shared home or having to reach out to other loved ones for help, which can further increase emotional stress and worry. Adjusting to changes in life and health during and after a loss can increase vulnerability and reduce adaptive reserves for coping with bereavement.

What can you do to cope with grief?

Emotional and physical self-care are essential ways to ease complications of grief and boost recovery. Exercising, spending time in nature, getting enough sleep and talking to loved ones can help with physical and mental health.

Most often, normal grief does not require professional intervention. Grief is a natural, instinctive response to loss, adaptation occurs naturally and healing is the natural outcome, especially with time and the support of loved ones.

Grief support professionals emphasize that social support, self-acceptance and good self-care usually help people get through normal grief. Many grief professionals encourage people to plan small, rewarding activities and try to enjoy them as much as possible. 🌱



Feeling Nothing During Grief: the Experience of Emotional Numbness

Adapted from "What's Your Grief"

There are so many things one can feel in this life — anger, joy, jealousy, love, shame, happiness, embarrassment, amusement, sadness, euphoria, frustration. The roller coaster of emotion whips over high peaks, spins and dips over and over again.

Except now, imagine that one day you get on the roller coaster, and as it climbs, falls, twists and turns, you realize that you feel nothing. You are sitting in a tiny cart being whipped around like a wet noodle, wondering why everyone else is laughing and throwing their hands in the air.

The technical word for feeling nothing is "anhedonia." Anhedonia is one of the main symptoms of major depressive disorder, although someone might also experience this sort of reaction in response to things like anxiety or trauma. In grief, it is common to experience emotional numbness, especially in the days to weeks following the death. Under any circumstance, feeling nothing feels awful.

What does "feeling nothing" feel like?

Anhedonia may be described as the loss of interest in previously rewarding or enjoyable activities such as hobbies, work, eating, laughter and spending time with friends and family, but some might say this description pales in comparison to real-life experience. It's very difficult to explain feelings of nothingness to people who feel a general something-ness. It has been described as, "Sometimes I feel like I'm melting, and sometimes I feel like I'm disappearing." Unfortunately, feelings of melting and disappearing can be difficult for people to relate to or truly grasp the magnitude of this disorder.

Feeling nothing is not akin to feeling "OK," underwhelmed or unenthused. Feeling nothing is more like feeling empty, dead inside, emotionless, as though you have nothing to contribute or as though you can't relate to the feelings and emotions of others (thus rendering social interaction problematic).

It's hard to understand how the absence of feeling can equal extreme pain and distress, but it does. When you feel nothing, the world seems to make less sense. You may look in the mirror and barely recognize yourself; without emotions, you feel alien, and it's hard to imagine being a person ever again.

Friends and family often show up in support and say things like, "I can only imagine everything you must be feeling right now" and send you cards that say, "Tears are a reflection of love," and you feel guilty because you're not crying.

Feeling nothing when you're supposed to feel intense sadness can be very disorienting. Many people experiencing this try to coax their emotions out by doing things like picking fights or by engaging in reckless behavior in hopes of feeling something. These behaviors don't help the end goal of having your emotions return. The good news is, in the absence of disorders like depression, bipolar disorder or anxiety, your feelings will eventually return. Therapy is also a good resource for anyone who feels that they need help while working through this part of their grief journey. 

Mission

Saving lives by honoring the gift of donation with dignity and compassion



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Place indicia here

Vision

Leading organ and tissue donation through excellence, quality and partnerships

Contact Us

For more information or questions, call **913-262-1668** or visit **mwtm.org**

To receive Serenity via email or to unsubscribe, please send your request to **dfamily@mwtm.org**.

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Save the Date: Donate Life Legacy Walk

Mark your calendar for **Saturday, June 4**, when MTN will host our annual Donate Life Legacy Walk. This free event brings together donor and recipient families as well as community partners and donation advocates to celebrate the gift of life. 

 **Registration opens Feb. 15:**
mwtm.org/legacy-walk