

## How to Preserve Your Health After Loss

**After the loss of a parent, whole healthy food and exercise habits may drop down your priority list.** Some days you don't feel like eating at all and yet other days you crave the comfort of heavy carbohydrate and high fat foods such as mashed potatoes, macaroni and cheese, or maybe a rich creamy soup. Everyone is different in how they personally react to stress and loss. After loss, you can toss and turn at night trying to turn off thinking about your loved one or just allowing the reality to sink into your mind. Your daily snack choices are coffee and fast food. The faster you can jump back on the healthy eating wagon, the faster your energy will increase.

**I recently had the opportunity to talk with Stacey Morgenstern, a Certified Holistic Health Counselor based in San Francisco,** to find out how to preserve your health, maintain solid nutrition, and sleep more soundly after the loss of a parent.

***Q: When grievors don't feel like eating, what are the essential foods families should have readily available that will provide the best nutritional return?***

**#1: Greens: Kale, collards, spinach, cabbage, arugula.** Leafy greens provide an almost immediate experience of freshness and strength. They are rich in fiber, which promotes healthy elimination and the balancing of hormones, which tend to dramatically affect our moods, especially when we are grieving. Besides the nutritional and physical benefits of greens, they also play a role in our emotional well-being—lifting our spirits, clearing the mind, and moving through anger. Eat at least one large serving of leafy greens per day.

**#2: Eat complex carbohydrates such as whole grains rather than white flour products and sugar.** Many people turn to comfort foods, such as heavy carbohydrates in times of loss. There is actually a physiological reason for this. Instead of heavy carbohydrates, try eating some complex carbohydrates because they are calming. In our bodies, they increase an amino acid called tryptophan, which in turn elevates the neurotransmitter serotonin. When serotonin is elevated, you experience a greater sense of relaxation, calm, and inner peace. Your self-esteem rises as does your sense of well-being. ***Try some whole grain bread with avocado, oatmeal with bananas and almonds, or even a small piece of dark chocolate (at least 70%) for a brain boost pick-me-up.*** Ask extended family and friends to bring nourishing foods to support you.

**#3 Easy snack foods: fresh fruits and pre-chopped veggies with some dip.** Order a platter of food from your favorite local restaurant to minimize prep. Soups and stews can also be quite nourishing. Ask friends to make extra, deliver it in labeled containers so you can freeze it.

***Q: Insomnia and sleep disturbances are very common after a major loss such as losing a spouse or parent. Do you recommend natural sleep remedies (Melatonin, 5HTP) to help or are there whole foods grievors can eat that assist with sleep?***

**Natural Sleep Aids to try: Kava-Kava, Valerian, Melatonin, Sunlight, Breathing Work, warm baths.**

**Kava-Kava tea:** We so often assume that nourishment is limited to what we put in our mouths. However, what about the nourishment that doesn't come on our plate? Things like movement, sleep, finances, relationships etc. All of these intersect when we talk about healthy grieving. Sleep is one of the most important factors in healing. Kava-kava tea calms the limbic system, the emotional center of the brain and is a natural muscle relaxant, making it useful for tension, backaches, headaches, and quieting the mental chatter at night.

**Valerian and melatonin.** Valerian is a sedative herb, used for centuries. You can find standardized extracts in health food stores and pharmacies. Take one to two capsules a half hour before bedtime.

Melatonin is a hormone that regulates the wake/sleep cycle and other daily biorhythms. Try sublingual tablets (to be placed under the tongue and allowed to dissolve); take 2.5 mg at bedtime as an occasional dose, making sure that your bedroom is completely dark. A much lower dose, 0.25 to 0.3 mg, is more effective for regular use.

**Natural sunlight.** Twenty minutes a day can help regulate sleep cycles. If you are worried about sun exposure, go out before 10am and after 4pm.

**Breathing:** Practice daily breathing exercises, such as Dr. Andrew Weil's 4-7-8 breath when falling asleep. Count to 4 on the inhale, hold for 7, and slowly exhale to the count of 8 again. Repeat 5-10x. This simple breathing exercise can help activate the parasympathetic nervous system, allowing for restful sleep.

**Baths:** Take a warm bath before bedtime.

Thanks Stacey!

FEATURED EXPERT: Stacey Morgenstern, CHNC, is a nutrition expert, writer and public speaker specializing in integrating healthy habits that last. She helps people show up for themselves when they fall off track with simple and easy strategies and unmatched support. For a 30 minute phone consultation contact Stacey at [stacey@fivepointwellness.com](mailto:stacey@fivepointwellness.com) or call 415-994-5484. If you want some quick, healthy, stress-free recipes to keep you nourished in hard times? Subscribe to her free newsletter at <http://www.fivepointwellness.com>

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