

Surviving Grief & the Holidays

Christmas, Kwanzaa, Hanukkah and other seasonal holidays are stressful for nearly everyone. But these festive occasions can be particularly difficult for those grieving the death of someone in their life.

The pain, sadness, and loneliness that can follow loss may feel unbearable and isolating when everyone around you is celebrating. This is especially true if it's the first holiday without that person.

"Grieving in general takes a tremendous amount of energy," says Marilyn Chapla, associate director of the non-profit Good Grief Center for Bereavement Support. "During the holidays, everyone's stress level is already high. Add a grief component and it's understandable why people who are grieving need an extra amount of compassion from their support system, which includes their healthcare providers."

Healthcare professionals are not exempt from grief and may find that they not only grieve personal loss, but also the death of patients or clients. The loss of a patient or client may bring up emotions related to a past or present personal loss.

It's easy for those in the care professions to lose sight of their own well-being.

"As professionals we are not free from the pain of grief, yet often we fail to take care of ourselves the way we take care of others. Give yourself a gift this year by being as kind and compassionate with yourself as you are with your patients or clients," Chapla says.

The Good Grief Center for Bereavement Support, located at 2717 Murray Avenue in the Squirrel Hill neighborhood of Pittsburgh, assists individuals and families as they work through the grieving process. Services are offered free of charge and include compassionate listening, grief education, referrals to community resources, therapists specializing in grief and access to a lending library of grief-related materials. Clients can receive emotional support and grief education from staff and trained volunteers in person, or over the phone at 412-224-4700.

Here are some tips to help you survive grief and the holidays. Share them with patients and clients, too:

- Be mindful of the energy that grieving and

the holidays take. Both are hard work and exhausting. Take care of yourself by spending your energy wisely, getting enough rest, and being careful not to overbook yourself with activities.

- If certain family traditions make you uncomfortable this year, don't do them. Do what feels right to you. Similarly, if you're feeling pressured to participate in more than you're comfortable with, try saying, "No thank you." Saying "no" to someone else is saying "yes" to yourself.

- If you are grieving too deeply and celebrating is not an option, remember the 3Cs: choice, communication and compromise. Give yourself permission to choose what specific things you want to do, and with whom you want to be. Communicate your thoughts and feelings about those choices with loved ones, especially those also affected by the loss. Finally, be open to compromising with family and friends on all issues.

- Find ways to include the loved one in your celebrations. Examples: Ask friends and family members to share recollections with you in photographs, stories and mementos. Nightly, light a holiday-scented memorial candle near a framed photo; a lit candle symbolizes hope. Put a place setting at the dinner table where the loved one always sat; then put a single flower on the plate and leave an empty glass to signify presence of spirit.

- Above all, trust that you will make it through the holidays this year.

For those who wish to support someone who is grieving: Be there for that person on their terms; let them grieve in their own way and at their own pace. Gently encourage them to talk about their grief and memories. Refer to their loved one by name; it's comforting. Listen to their story. Hold their hand. Sit with them as they cry. Offer help with holiday chores or daily activities. Respect their decision not to attend celebrations, and their need to be alone. Be supportive, and remind them there are organizations that can help them cope with their grief.

For more tips or grief-related information, contact the Good Grief Center at support@goodgrief-center.com; or 412-224-4700 or 1-888-GRIEF-88; or visit www.goodgriefcenter.com. †



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Consider, as one example out of many, the case of bandages. Many cohesive medical bandages use NRL; however, if the traditional untreated NRL is not modified, it can pose a potential risk of provoking a sensitive skin reaction. Bandages produced with this aluminum hydroxide-modified NRL adhesive have a 20-fold lower protein content than bandages made with adhesive containing traditional untreated NRL. A combination of greatly reduced protein, improved processing at the product manufacturing level, and effective adhesion makes this patented aluminum hydroxide-modified NRL a prominent candidate for the next generation of NRL adhesives.

In addition to removing a majority of the proteins that are known to trigger latex allergies, production employing this aluminum hydroxide-modified NRL can be greener and more energy efficient than traditional latex production, making it an attractive option for end-product manufacturers.

The use of this aluminum hydroxide-modified NRL in product manufacturing can save a great deal of water and energy compared to traditional untreated latex, because, although the latter also involves the removal of proteins from latex, it does so through a much less efficient process of repeated cycles of rinsing, leaching and drying to achieve some reduced protein levels. The aluminum hydroxide-modified NRL with its ultra low protein levels does not require these additional process steps to attain the same or greater results.

What is particularly encouraging about this development is the fact that it allows manufacturers of latex products to continue working with natural rubber latex—which is 100% biodegradable—rather than turning to a synthetic petroleum-based alternative such as PVC vinyl, styrene, nitrile or chloroprene. Unlike these alternatives, natural rubber latex has a minimal impact in the environment; leave it outside and it will biodegrade roughly as quickly as an oak leaf will.

The development of this patented aluminum hydroxide-modified NRL thus has the potential to pave the way for a new era in the use of latex products in nearly every industry, but most notably in the healthcare arena. As more products made with this material enter the marketplace, it is reasonable to expect that hospitals and other facilities will find it a welcome alternative to traditional NRL. Both patients and their caregivers who are prone to latex allergies may find a new class of products at their disposal that can aid in the healing process while potentially minimizing the immune responses that could result from traditional untreated NRL proteins. †

William R. Doyle is President and CEO of Vystar® Corporation (www.vytex.com), the exclusive creator of Vytex® Natural Rubber Latex, a multi-patented, all-natural raw material that contains significantly reduced levels of antigenic proteins found in natural rubber latex and can be used in over 40,000 products. He can be reached at 770.965.0383.