

## Health Tip: Coping with Tragedy

For people with friends and family living in Haiti, the recent tragedy has been extremely difficult. Watching news coverage of the earthquake's devastation can be very distressing, particularly if there is limited information on the safety and well-being of loved ones. Even those without personal connections to the country may experience emotional pain.

Individuals will vary in their reactions. Some symptoms of severe stress and grief include loss of appetite, disruption in sleep patterns, not having energy to engage in activities with friends and family, and persistent feelings of sadness.

There are a number of steps you can take to help restore emotional well being and a sense of control following a traumatic event. The American Psychological Association offers the following tips to help manage your pain:

- **Take a news break.** Watching endless replays of footage from the disaster can make your stress even greater. Although you will want to keep informed - especially if you have loved ones in Haiti - taking a break from watching the news can lessen your distress.
- **Control what you can.** Maintain routines and schedules, such as going to work or the gym and making meals, to give yourself a break from constantly thinking about the earthquake.
- **Engage in healthy behaviors.** Eat well-balanced meals, fit in regular exercise like going for a long walk, and get plenty of rest. Bolstering your physical well-being is good for your emotional health and can enhance your ability to cope.
- **Find a productive way to help if you can.** Many organizations are set up to provide various forms of aid to survivors. Contributing or volunteering is a positive action that can help you to make a difference in your own life and the lives of others.
- **Keep things in perspective.** While an earthquake can bring tremendous hardship and loss, remember to focus on the things that are good in your life. Persevere and trust in your ability to get through the challenging days ahead.
- **Strive for a positive outlook.** Many people who have experienced tragedy find that they grow in some respect as a result of getting through the hardship. Over time, people can discover personal strengths and develop a greater appreciation for life.

Reach out to friends and family members. Connecting with people provides social support and strengthens resilience. Some find comfort in their spirituality, whether through organized religion or privately.

For many people, using the strategies above may be sufficient to get them through current challenges. It is not unusual, however, to find that serious problems persist and continue to interfere with daily living. Seek additional emotional support if necessary: Employee Assistance Programs (EAP), family doctors or clergy can provide valuable assistance and resources to help manage stress.

Sources: American Psychological Association, LifeWork Strategies EAP (youradvocate.com), and Washington and Shady Grove Adventist Hospitals. The Health Tip of the Week is for educational purposes only. For additional information, consult your physician. Please feel free to copy and distribute this health resource.