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INTERNATIONAL GRIEF INSTITUTE

# RESILIENCE RX

## HUG THERAPY

### Self care techniques for the bereaved

The science behind why they work and how to implement them after loss



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An iCare Aftercare™ resource  
International Grief Institute

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## BENEFITS

The average length of a hug between two people is 3 seconds. Research shows that a hug lasting at least 20 seconds has a therapeutic effect on the body and mind.

We need 4 hugs a day for survival. We need 8 hugs a day for maintenance. We need 12 hugs a day for growth.

VIRGINIA SATIR, psychotherapist



- ✓ Promotes contentment
- ✓ Reduces anxiety and stress
- ✓ Lowers heart rate
- ✓ Lowers cortisol level

## WHY IT WORKS

Hugs balance out the nervous system. Skin contains a network of tiny pressure centers that can sense touch and notify the brain through the vagus nerve. The galvanic skin response of someone receiving and giving a hug shows a change in skin conductance which suggests a more balanced state in the parasympathetic nervous system.

A sincere embrace also produces the love hormone oxytocin which helps us feel relaxed, feel safe, and calms fears and anxiety. Oxytocin is a neurotransmitter that acts on the limbic system, the brain's emotional center, and has many benefits in our physical and mental health. A natural tranquilizer, it helps us to relax, to feel safe and calm our fears and anxiety. And it's free every time we hug, cradle a child, cherish a dog or cat, slow dance, or simply hold the shoulders of a friend.

## Emotional connection

Hugging releases endorphins and serotonin into the blood vessels which cause pleasure and negate pain and sadness. It also reduces the risk of heart problems, helps fight excess weight, and prolongs life. Hugging raises our serotonin levels, elevating mood and creating happiness.

## Healthy benefits

Hugs stimulate the brain to release dopamine, the pleasure hormone. Hugs also apply gentle pressure on the sternum which stimulates the thymus gland, which regulates and balances the production of white blood cells and keeps you healthy.

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Hugging boosts self-esteem. Gentle touch shows us that we're loved and special and tactile sensations from our early years become imbedded in our nervous system as we grow into adults. They become imprinted at a cellular level, and therefore connect us to our ability to self love.

## Hugging . . .

- ✓ Is an excellent way to express yourself nonverbally
- ✓ can actually make you receptive enough to pay it forward to others
- ✓ Reduces pain
- ✓ Boosts self esteem
- ✓ Fosters connections
- ✓ Stimulates happy hormones
- ✓ Builds immunity