

ALLINA HEALTH

# Caring for You

*healing  
after the loss  
of a baby*



Allina Health



*Our sincere sympathy to you  
and your family*

*The loss of a baby is one of the most profound,  
stressful events an adult may experience.*

*For many, attachment to their baby began before or at the  
time of conception. Whenever and however your loss occurred,  
the heartache is profound.*

*We are here to support you. Your baby's life has touched our  
hearts too. It truly has been an honor to care for you,  
your family and your baby.*

*With gratitude,*  
YOUR HEALTH CARE TEAM

## Healing After the Loss of a Baby

Taking care of yourself is a priority. You are going through physical and hormonal changes in addition to emotional pain.

We hope that you will find this information helpful as you begin your journey of healing.

### Emotional Healing

Emotional bonding happens well before birth. The loss of a baby can represent many losses: loss of a significant person, loss of aspect of self, loss of dreams, and loss of creation.

After the loss of a baby, women are at risk for anxiety and depression. This could happen right after the loss or even 1 to 2 years later.

If you have questions or concerns about how you are feeling, please talk with your primary care provider who can refer you to a mental health provider if needed.

You will find yourself experiencing a wide range of feelings. There is no right or wrong way to journey through grief. Everyone is different.

The following emotions are commonly reported by parents who have experienced a loss. You may be experiencing some of these feelings as well.

- You may feel a great sense of emptiness and loss, as well as anxiety, irritability or restlessness.
- You may no longer be interested in activities that you once enjoyed or found appealing.
- You may feel forgetful, find it hard to concentrate and have a hard time making even simple decisions.
- You may feel very vulnerable and be experiencing guilt and self-doubt. You may wonder, “what if I had done something different?” These feelings are not uncommon in grieving parents.
- You may feel angry, hurt or wonder, “Why did this happen to me?”
- You may feel isolated and alone in your grief, as if no one can understand the depth of your pain and loss.

These emotions may come and go. Some days you may feel well and then other days you will find yourself down again. It is common to move back and forth between emotions and stages of grief for days, weeks and months. Grieving your precious baby takes time. You deserve time and support as you move through the grieving process.

## Grief

Grief is a whole-person response to loss. It involves your emotions, your thoughts, your body, your spirits, your whole self.

Sadness, depressed mood, irritability, anxiety, feeling distracted and changes in eating and sleeping are all part of a healthy grief process.

Pregnancy loss can often leave a woman feeling helpless, hopeless and bereaved. This may be caused by feeling like she could have done something differently during the pregnancy or the feeling that she lost a part of herself. These feelings can also be caused by how others react to the loss. They may not grieve or acknowledge the loss in the same way.

There is no one right way to grieve, rather allowing yourself or giving yourself permission to grieve is part of the healing process. The loss of a baby can be a life changing event. It can cause mood swings and lead to feelings of emptiness, dread and guilt. It is important to tell your story and have someone there to listen.

Women may experience emotional responses such as extreme sadness and guilt. Partners often experience a range of feelings such as isolation, restlessness, anger, sadness and powerlessness.

## When to get help for emotional healing

Everyone will move through the grief process differently and experience various emotions, and do this in their own time. However, you may benefit from additional help in coping with your grief if:

- you feel consumed and overwhelmed with grief

- you feel you are falling apart or your functioning has significantly changed
- you are engaging in addictive or destructive behaviors such as using alcohol or drugs to ease the pain of grief
- you are still having trouble sleeping or eating, even though it has been several months since your baby died
- you are distant or disengaged from your partner, family or friends in a way that isolates you from someone who can listen or support you
- you feel overwhelmed with anger or hostility either with yourself or others
- you continue to find no joy in your life
- you are having intense feeling of fear or panic
- your feelings, behaviors or physical symptoms are interfering with your ability to function at home, work or in social situations
- you have trouble coping with painful emotions.

If you have had depression or anxiety in the past, or this is not your first loss, it is not uncommon for these symptoms to return after the loss of a baby. It may be helpful for you to talk with a therapist.

## WHAT TO DO IN A CRISIS

If you are thinking about harming yourself or others, get help right away.

- Call your primary care provider.
- Call 911 or go to the nearest hospital Emergency Department. (Ask a family member or friend to help you.)
- Call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-TALK (1-800-273-8255) to talk to a trained counselor. (This is free, 24-hour hotline.)

## Physical Healing

### After birth pains

Your uterus is where your baby was growing inside of you. As your uterus shrinks, you may be able to feel it cramp off and on for several days. To help ease discomfort:

- keep your bladder empty
- take warm baths/showers or use a heating pad on a low setting
- take acetaminophen (such as Tylenol®) or ibuprofen (such as Advil®). Follow package directions.

## Vaginal bleeding

You will have a bloody vaginal flow (lochia) that is part of your uterus healing. The color will go from red to brown to yellowish discharge. This can last for about 2 to 4 weeks after delivery.

In the beginning, it is like a heavy menstrual period. You will need to wear maxi pads until the flow decreases and then mini pads will work well. Do not use tampons or douche until your doctor says it is OK.

## Hormone changes

Hormone changes can affect you physically and emotionally.

Hormone changes can cause you to sweat day or night. For relief, it is best to wear comfortable clothing in layers that can be easily removed. Shower or bathing daily will help you feel better too.

The emotional effects of hormone changes can be harder to cope with. If you are concerned that you might have postpartum depression, talk with your primary care provider or a mental health provider. He or she can help you decide if you are dealing with postpartum depression along with your grief. Medicine, counseling, or both are used to treat depression and can be very effective.

## Breast changes

Your breasts may start to produce milk 2 to 5 days after the birth of your baby.

For some women, this is heartbreaking. For other women, it is a precious reminder of their baby. Every woman experiences this differently. Whatever you feel is OK.

If your breasts produce milk, they can become tender, swollen and leak milk.

To reduce discomfort:

- wear a tighter fitting bra (such as a sports bra)
- take acetaminophen (such as Tylenol®) or ibuprofen (such as Advil®). Follow package directions and your doctor's instructions.
- use ice packs. Put a lightweight cloth over your skin before applying the ice pack. Do not apply the ice pack longer than 20 minutes at a time. You may use the ice pack as often as you like for comfort.
- avoid stimulation.

If your breasts are feeling very full, you can hand express or pump a small amount of milk to make your breasts feel more comfortable. It may take slightly longer for your breasts to stop producing milk, but for some women the increased comfort is worth it.

## Bladder concerns

If you had a lot of swelling in your body during your pregnancy, you are likely to pass more urine 2 to 5 days after birth as your body gets rid of extra fluid.

## Constipation

You may experience some constipation. To help avoid this:

- Drink six to eight 8-ounce glasses of water a day.
- Eat whole grains, fruits and vegetables.
- Increase your activity as you feel more comfortable.
- Decrease the use of opioid pain medicine when you can.

Take any medicines as directed by your doctor.

## Hemorrhoids

Hemorrhoids are swollen, inflamed veins located around the anus. It may take 2 to 4 weeks for them to shrink. To help ease discomfort:

- take a warm tub bath
- rest
- avoid constipation
- avoid straining when you have a bowel movement
- use an over-the-counter hemorrhoid cream.

## After a miscarriage

- Your vagina may itch or be tender. You should heal within about 14 days.
- For relief, you may sit in a tub of warm water for 10 to 20 minutes. Do this 2 to 3 times a day until you are feeling better.
- It is usually recommended to not have sex until your bleeding has stopped and your cervix has healed. This may take 4 to 6 weeks. If you have any questions, please talk with your doctor.
- You may ovulate 2 to 4 weeks after a miscarriage. It is possible to get pregnant during this time. Your period will typically resume in about 6 weeks.
- It is important to talk with your doctor about birth control before having sex, if desired.
- It is OK to climb stairs or walk. Do not lift more than 15 pounds for a few days. If pain or bleeding increase, this may be a sign that you are doing too much.
- Truly listening to your body will help guide your activity level. Rest or take short naps when you can.



## When to call your doctor

Call your doctor if you have:

- heavy bleeding (maxi pad soaked in 1 hour or less)
- blood clots that are large (baseball size or larger)
- a feeling of lightheadedness, weakness, or you faint
- bad-smelling or greenish vaginal discharge
- fever or chills with a temperature higher than 100.4 F
- tenderness or severe cramps in your abdomen
- a sudden increase in your swelling
- a deep redness warmth or swelling in your legs
- pain when you point your toes toward your nose
- constant back, abdominal or pelvic pain
- pain or burning with urination
- any problems breathing
- have new pain, pain that gets worse or pain that does not stop
- have any questions or concerns.

## Self-care and Self-compassion

In times of stress, it is common to be hard on yourself for how you are managing stress. One of the best ways to care for yourself during difficult times is to be compassionate toward you.

### Self-compassion

- Be mindful of your experience. Acknowledge what is happening in the moment and try to accept it.
- Tell yourself, “I am scared, I am angry and this is very hard.”
- Recognize that suffering is a part of humanity. Remind yourself that anybody in this situation would likely be having a similar experience.
- Be kind to yourself. For example, “This hurts, this is really hard and painful, and I am not alone” or “This will be difficult and I will get through it.”

## Self-care

- Get plenty of rest.
- Eat healthful foods.
- Get regular physical activity. (Follow any instructions your doctor gives you.)
- Find a support in a group.
- See a therapist when you find it hard to cope with everyday expectations.
- Connect with family and friends.
- Follow-up with your primary care provider about your loss. Ask any questions you might have and talk about future plans for trying to become pregnant again.
- Ask others for what you need. They want to help, but may not know how.

## Getting Help

Getting help is healthy, yet it takes courage to ask for help. It does not imply weakness, mental illness or a character flaw. Getting help can:

- allow you to feel and express a wide range of emotions in a safe and supportive environment
- learn new ways of coping
- meet other parents who are also grieving a loss.

You may wish to speak with a therapist or other professional who has experience working with bereaved persons or infant loss. Some find support groups with other bereaved parents very helpful.

If you are interested in talking with someone but are not sure who to call, talk with your doctor (or childbirth specialist) or primary care provider who can provide you with a referral to the right mental health provider.

Remember, getting help shows courage, personal strength and health rather than weakness.

## Resources

### **Allina Health Support Groups**

- Pregnancy and Infant Loss
- Pregnancy After a Loss
- Grandparents Support Group

Call 651-241-6206 for dates and times.

### **Center for Grief, Loss & Transition**

counseling and group support

651-641-0177

[griefloss.org](http://griefloss.org)

### **Children's Hospitals and Clinics Bereavement Support**

651-220-7191

### **Faith's Lodge**

612-825-2073

[faithslodge.org](http://faithslodge.org)

### **Infants Remembered in Silence, Inc. (IRIS)**

providers support, education and resources

507-334-4748

[irisremembers.com](http://irisremembers.com)

### **Missing GRACE Foundation**

group support for families'

763-497-0709

[missinggrace.org](http://missinggrace.org)

### **Pregnancy & Postpartum Support Minnesota**

pregnancy and infant loss resources

612-787-7776

[ppsupportmn.org/pregnancyinfantloss](http://ppsupportmn.org/pregnancyinfantloss)

### **Psychotherapy & Healing Associates, LTD – Pregnancy and Infant Loss Center**

pregnancy and infant loss support groups

612-296-3800

[phawellness.com/pregnancy-infant-loss](http://phawellness.com/pregnancy-infant-loss)

**Shoshana Center**

Dr. Deb Rich, PhD  
counseling (psychotherapy)  
651-645-5504  
shoshanacenter.com

**The Compassionate Friends**

online support group  
1-877-969-0010  
compassionatefriends.org

**Communal Cremation Services**

Allina Health offers communal cremation services for families who lost a baby before 20 weeks. This service is offered at no charge. The cremation takes place at Lakewood Cemetery in Minneapolis, Minn. The scattering of ashes is done at a memorial site dedicated to the memory of babies. This site is located in Lot 39 (Babyland).

If you are interested in communal cremation services, please talk with a member of your health care team.

Families who are not interested in communal cremation services have the option to hold private burial or cremation services at their own expense.

# Notes

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