



After a Miscarriage: Surviving Emotionally

Now that you have experienced a pregnancy loss you are probably feeling more sadness than you ever thought possible. Having a miscarriage can be very difficult. The emotional impact can usually take longer to heal than the physical impact. Allowing yourself to grieve the loss can help you come to accept it over time.

What are emotions I might feel after a miscarriage?

Women may experience a roller coaster of emotions such as numbness, disbelief, anger, guilt, sadness, depression, and difficulty concentrating. Even if the pregnancy ended very early, the sense of bonding between a mother and her baby can be strong. Some women even experience physical symptoms from their emotional distress. These symptoms include: fatigue, trouble sleeping, difficulty concentrating, loss of appetite, and frequent episodes of crying. The hormonal changes that occur after miscarriage may intensify these symptoms.



The Grief Process: What should I expect?

The grieving process involves three steps:

Step 1: Shock/Denial: "This really isn't happening; I've been taking good care of myself"

Step 2: Anger/Guilt/Depression: "Why me? If I would have..." "I've always wanted a baby so bad, this isn't fair. I feel sadness in my life now more than ever."

Step 3: Acceptance: "I have to deal with it, I'm not the only one who has experienced this. Other women have made it through this, maybe I should get some help."

Each step takes longer to go through than the previous one. There are unexpected and sometimes anticipated triggers that lead to setbacks. Examples of potential triggers include: baby showers, birth experience stories, new babies, OB/GYN office visits, nursing mothers, thoughtless comments, holidays, and family reunions.

How can I survive my pregnancy loss?

Respect your needs and limitations as you work through your grief and begin to heal. As you work through this difficult time:

- Reach out to those closest to you. Ask for understanding, comfort and support.
- Seek counseling to help both yourself and your partner. You don't have to face this alone.
- Allow yourself plenty of time to grieve and the opportunity to remember.

How Women and Men Grieve Differently:

Generally women are more expressive about their loss, and more likely to seek support from others. Men may be more action-oriented, tend to gather facts and problem solve, and therefore often do not choose to participate in support networks that consist of sharing feelings. This does not mean he is not grieving. Often men bury themselves in work when they are grieving.

Parents experience different levels of bonding with a baby. The bond between a pregnant woman and the baby growing inside her is unique. A woman can begin bonding from the moment she has a positive pregnancy test. Bonding for the father may start as he experiences physical signs of the baby, such as seeing an ultrasound picture or feeling the baby kick. However, real bonding may not develop until after the baby is born. This is why men may seem less affected when the loss of the baby occurs early in pregnancy. These differences may cause strain in your relationship as you try to come to terms with the loss.

...Don't Worry About a Thing...Cause Every Little Thing Is Going to Be Alright...



You can help your relationship to survive by:

- Being respectful and sensitive of each other's needs and feelings.
- Sharing your thoughts and emotions by keeping communication lines open.
- Accepting differences and acknowledging each other's coping styles.

Understanding Your Healing Rights:

Healing doesn't mean forgetting or making the memories insignificant. Healing means refocusing. You have the right to:

- Know the facts about what happened and potential implications for the future. Seek answers to your questions, look at the medical records, and take notes.
- Make decisions about what you would like to do with your maternity clothes and baby items. Others might try to make quick choices for you; instead use others to help you figure out what option is best for you.
- Protect yourself by avoiding situations that you know will be difficult. Set realistic goals for yourself. For example, focus on coping through the day rather than the entire week.
- Take time to grieve and heal. There is no set time allotment for healing nor is it something that can be rushed.
- Receive support even though this may not be easy for you. If you feel out of control or overwhelmed, consider seeking help from a counselor, therapist or support group to help guide you through the grieving process.
- Be sad and joyful. It is okay to feel sad at times but the key is to not let it control you. Others have survived their grief, and in time you will too. Do enjoyable things because laughter and joy are healers. Remember that celebrating bits of joy doesn't dishonor your loss.
- Remember your baby. Healing doesn't mean forgetting or making the memories insignificant. You may want to name your baby. Some women find comfort by doing something tangible like planting a tree, selecting a special piece of jewelry with a birthstone, or donating to a charity. On the anniversary you may want to share a special time with your partner.



Helpful Web sites and Books:

Parents or other family members who have experienced the loss of a baby between conception and the first month of life can receive a free March of Dimes bereavement kit by contacting the Fulfillment Center at 1-800-367-6630 or at bkit@marchofdimes.com

Other Helpful Web sites:

- www.mend.org
- www.pain-heartache-hope.com
- www.angelsinheaven.org
- www.babyloss.com
- www.miscarriagesupport.org.nz

Helpful Books:

- Miscarriage: Women sharing from the Heart — by Shelly Marks, Marie Allen
- Miscarriage: A Shattered Dream — by Sherokee Isle, Linda Hammer Burns
- Surviving Pregnancy Loss: A complete sourcebook for women and their families — by Rochelle Friedman and Bonnie Gradstein