

MISCARRIAGE

A Physical & Emotional Time

Miscarriage is part of a whole range of fertility and pregnancy experiences. It is not a rare occurrence. Ed Sheeran's poignant song, 'Small Bump Unborn' captures the pain and grief of losing a baby before birth.

What is Miscarriage?

The loss of a pregnancy before the 20th week of pregnancy, or before survival outside the womb is possible. About 20% or 1 in 4 pregnancies end in miscarriage. Most miscarriages occur during the first 14 weeks of pregnancy; about half of those ending in the first 8 weeks involve chromosomal abnormalities unlikely to recur in future pregnancies. A whopping 50% of all fertilized eggs do not continue to pregnancy. A woman may not even miss a period or know that she was pregnant. When a pregnancy just stops growing, this is called a 'blighted ovum.' In about 20% of cases a hormonal imbalance hinders development and for 10% of women, the womb may have a faulty design that doesn't support a pregnancy. For many, the cause of the miscarriage may never be known. Recurrent miscarriage is investigated after three consecutive losses.



When a pregnancy ends suddenly in a miscarriage, physical recovery is much quicker than emotional healing. Many women describe it as an 'emotional roller coaster'. It's difficult for a couple as there is no formula to help them through this devastating time. Some couples bond closely in sharing the loss whilst others find a distance opens between them.

Risk factors

Obesity
Diabetes
Smoking
Multiple pregnancy
Chemical toxins (such as arsenic, benzene lead, formaldehyde, ethylene oxide)

Signs and Symptoms of Miscarriage

Any combination of symptoms may be present, with vaginal bleeding often being the first sign. About 25% of women get a light 'spotting' of blood in early pregnancy as the embryo implants and this is normal, but if it persists or increases, a checkup will put your mind at ease. Some women experience pain and this is due to spasms in the womb. The pain may be felt in the abdomen, pelvis or lower back or even up into the shoulders. There may be fever, chills, aches and pains, just like a dose of 'flu.

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Ectopic pregnancy

An ectopic pregnancy happens when an embryo implants outside the womb – usually in the Fallopian Tube, attached to the abdomen or around an ovary. Early detection is vital as a rupture of an ectopic pregnancy is life-threatening. Many women may not even realise that they are pregnant as there may not be any noticeable blood loss. Any sudden, severe pain around the abdominal region in a woman of child bearing age needs to be fully checked by going to Accident and Emergency (A&E).

What to Do

If you notice any combination of these symptoms or just feel that something is wrong, trust your instincts. Call your doctor, midwife or hospital or head to the A&E. An ultrasound will check the baby's health.

Someone should stay with you and drive you to hospital or clinic. Don't drive yourself.

Keep count of the number of pads used. Soaking a pad in an hour means urgent care is needed.

Rest in bed if not advised to go to hospital.

This may sound obvious but avoid baths, tampons and sex.

What next?

Treatment involves medication for pain and maybe antibiotics to help clear the womb and prevent infection. Sometimes doctors prefer to let nature take its course and send women home. A small operation under anaesthetic, called a D&C, maybe required to empty the womb, stop the pain and prevent infection. A hospital stay is rarely required. It's usual to feel a bit sore and to continue to bleed for a few days afterwards. Remember, you are still full of pregnancy hormones and may continue to feel pregnant.

If you are sent to hospital for further tests, you will unfortunately be sitting in a waiting room full of happily pregnant women, which is really upsetting. Often the staff don't appreciate this, as they are focusing on your physical symptoms. Also, some of the medical terms used sound old-fashioned, cold and clinical and add further to the upset you are feeling.

What to look out for following a miscarriage

Bleeding
Pain ... cramps
Smelly discharge
Fever ... 'flu-like symptoms
Feeling weak, dizzy or light-headed

Miscarriage - living with pregnancy loss

No one expects to lose their baby. As soon as you get a positive pregnancy test you are waiting to be a mum, holding your perfect, healthy baby. The sense of loss and grief after miscarriage is devastating. It's usual to feel numb for a while, or an overwhelming cascade of emotions. You may be withdrawn or find emotions are intense. It's shocking to feel out of control. There is no right way to

feel or to grieve. Everyone is different. You may find a farewell ceremony helpful. Partners help in this transition by validating feelings, being positive about the future, reminding you of your strengths and capabilities while letting you talk and grieve. Family, friends and professionals say the most hurtful things, usually inadvertently and clichés wound, such as 'You'll have another in no time' diminishes the impact of your loss. Talk to people who listen supportively.

Most women do find a point of resolution about twelve weeks after a miscarriage. You recover in your own time and in your own way, regaining your self-confidence. Some couples focus on getting pregnant as soon as possible whilst others need to wait until they feel stronger. It's very important that you don't let anyone rush you. Be

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gentle with each other. Each of you is grieving the loss of your expected baby - the hopes and dreams that accompany pregnancy. It sometimes takes longer than you wish to get used to living with pregnancy loss. If the good parts of a day don't outweigh the bad after the 12-week mark, it's time to consider getting some professional help. Miscarriage should not be taken lightly and is an event that changes you.

There are still the pregnancy milestones to consider: key milestones like scan dates and the due date, watching other's pregnancies progress, the birth of babies around your due date. You can choose to step back until you feel stronger being around women with new babies. Joining in and getting out really do help you begin to feel normal again.

How soon can I try to conceive again?

The risk of miscarrying again after pregnancy loss is the same as before.

Periods resume 4-6 weeks after a miscarriage.

Your doctor will advise you when it is physically safe for you to conceive again.

You'll know when you and your partner feel ready to start trying to conceive again.

Helena Tubridge



Helena Tubridge RGN RM is a clinical hypnotherapist, mindfulness trainer and blogger with a background in Nursing and Midwifery. She specializes in Fertility, IVF coaching and miscarriage counseling. With over three decades of experience, she treats clients from all over Ireland at her practice in Co Meath.

www.HelenaTubridge.com