

## Miscarriage and grief

**Miscarriage happens to about one in five confirmed pregnancies. Even though it's a common experience, many women need time to grieve the death of their baby and the loss of their pregnancy.**

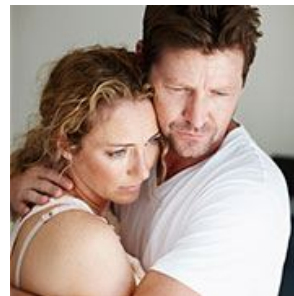
### What is a miscarriage?

Miscarriage is also known as early pregnancy loss or spontaneous abortion. It's when a baby dies before 20 weeks of pregnancy.

Most miscarriages happen in the first 12 weeks (first trimester). Miscarriage can happen before a woman even knows she's pregnant.

Miscarriage is common and **happens for many different reasons**, usually because the pregnancy isn't developing properly. There is little medically that can be done to stop a miscarriage.

Miscarriage isn't your fault, and it doesn't happen because of anything you've done.



### did you know ?

In Australia miscarriage means that a pregnancy has ended before 20 weeks.

Approximately one in five pregnancies ends in miscarriage before 20 weeks, although most of these occur before 12 weeks.



Vaginal bleeding doesn't always mean that a miscarriage is happening. But you should see your doctor or midwife straight away if you notice any vaginal bleeding during your pregnancy.

### Your body after miscarriage

If you've had a miscarriage, you might have vaginal bleeding as your body tries to pass the [pregnancy tissue](#).

Often the pregnancy tissue can pass on its own within a few days or in up to 3-4 weeks. While you're waiting for this to happen, you might notice heavier bleeding and period cramps. But if your bleeding gets heavier, you have a lot of pain, or you think you have an infection, you will **need to see a doctor immediately**.

**Signs of infection** might be a bad smell from the vaginal bleeding or you feeling feverish or sick.

If the pregnancy tissue doesn't pass on its own, your doctor or midwife might offer you medication, or suggest that you have a dilatation and curettage (D&C) to help with this. A D&C is a surgical procedure that gently clears the lining of the uterus after a miscarriage. You can also look at these options if you don't want to wait for the pregnancy tissue to pass naturally.

You can talk with your doctor or midwife to help you decide on the safest and best option for you after miscarriage.

### Your feelings after miscarriage

Miscarriage affects your emotions as well as your body.

A miscarriage can bring up intense feelings of grief, emptiness, sadness, anger, anxiety and depression. A miscarriage can be shocking and devastating because you've lost not only a baby but also your hopes and dreams of becoming a parent to that baby.

Many parents want answers about how and why the miscarriage happened. It's hard, because often there's no clear reason for the miscarriage.



I just felt empty for a long time. I felt that I had let my baby down by not protecting her. In

hindsight, I realised there was nothing I could have done to prevent this, but at the time, I felt it was my fault.  
– Rebekah

### Grief after miscarriage

Every miscarriage is unique, and there's no right way to feel about it. Everyone grieves differently and in their own time. **You can't rush your grief and healing.**

Mourning the loss of your baby can be physically and emotionally draining. It's normal to feel up and down for some time. You might also find that grief and sadness come up at specific times of the year – for example, your baby's due date or the anniversary of the miscarriage. These feelings can also come up if you become pregnant again. Or the grief might catch you by surprise, when you're not expecting it.

You might need to take some time off work. It's OK to ask your workplace about personal or bereavement leave.

There are support organisations that offer a caring and accepting environment where you can share your feelings with other people who've been through miscarriage or a similar loss. This can reassure you that your feelings are normal.

The intensity of your grief **might be influenced by some of these factors:**

- how long you were trying to conceive
- whether your pregnancy was planned or unplanned
- how old you are – there might be more pressure to have a baby as a woman gets older
- how you conceived – for example, IVF pregnancy involves a huge physical, emotional and financial commitment
- how many times you've had a miscarriage – miscarrying many times can make your grief more intense and make it harder to believe that you'll ever have a baby
- how long you'd been pregnant before miscarrying
- how much support you're getting from your partner, extended family and friends.



She was our daughter and we loved her very much. We just wanted people to understand this wasn't 'just a miscarriage'. It was the loss of all our hopes and dreams for our daughter.  
– Rebekah

### Grief for partners after miscarriage

Fathers or partners can often feel left out when their partner miscarries. This is because the mother experienced the physical loss of the baby, and people often think of her needs first.

Some men find it hard to say what they're feeling, which might make their partners think they're not feeling as much grief. Other men might not want to express their feelings in front of people. Or they might do physical activities, such as exercise, or spend more time at work as an outlet for their emotions.

Sometimes men want close contact with their partners, but it might be more comfortable for them to be a 'shoulder to cry on'. Some men feel powerless because they can't comfort their partners.

If you can **share your feelings and talk openly** with your partner after a miscarriage, it can help you both through this difficult time.



One week we were bringing a child into the world and then we weren't – there was this deep sense of loss.  
– Daniel

## Sharing your grief about miscarriage with others

Breaking the news about your miscarriage to family and friends, and letting them know why you're grieving, can be very upsetting. It can be even harder if you hadn't yet told them you were pregnant.

Not everyone will understand your need to acknowledge your baby and to grieve for your baby's loss. People sometimes try to give comfort by saying things that minimise your loss – for example, 'At least you know you're fertile' or 'At least you have your other children'.

Although they want to comfort and support you, they might not understand your experience. What they're saying might sound like empty words to you.

Other people say things like, 'I'm sorry for your loss', and leave it to you to respond.

**Many people find that it does help to tell others.** You could let close friends and family know what your baby meant to you, what support you need and how much you want to share your experience. If you don't feel like talking about your miscarriage, you could consider sharing it in writing.



I just wanted people to acknowledge that it was a baby – my baby.  
– Kim

## Acknowledging the loss of your baby

Many parents find that doing something more formal to acknowledge the loss of their baby helps their healing.

Here are some ways to acknowledge your baby after a miscarriage:

- Having a memorial service: many hospitals offer communal annual remembrance services, or you could have a private memorial service at home with family and friends.
- Donating to a charity: you could buy or make something to give to a worthy organisation.
- Naming your baby: even if you didn't know your baby's gender, naming your baby acknowledges that your baby was a person to you.
- Collecting mementos: you could have a special box for things such as the initial positive pregnancy test, ultrasound photos, hospital tag, sympathy cards, pressed flowers and maybe toys or clothes that were ready for the baby.
- Choosing a keepsake: this could be something like an ornament or jewellery.
- Creating something: this could be a drawing, quilt, scrapbook or a piece of music.
- Making a memorial place: for example, you could plant a tree or choose a place that you love.
- Saying goodbye: you could do this by writing a poem or a letter to your baby.
- Burying your baby: although burial or cremation isn't a legal requirement before 20 weeks, it might be something you need to do for cultural or religious reasons. It's possible to have a burial, either at home or in a cemetery.



I keep the photos and film of the ultrasound in a special box. They are evidence that my baby had existed. I pull them out quite often and look at them.  
– Kim

## Looking after yourself after miscarriage

There are several things you can do to look after yourself after miscarriage:

- Talk about your experience with a friend or relative who has also lost a baby. This can help you feel understood and validate your feelings.
- Join a pregnancy loss support group or a trustworthy online forum.
- Seek counselling with a mental health professional trained in pregnancy loss. This can help you come to terms with your experience.

- Make sure you have sensitive and understanding people around you, especially around anniversaries that mark your baby's birth date, conception date or any other significant dates. These days can trigger grief and also fear about future miscarriage.
- Keep a journal to record your thoughts, feelings and memories. This can be a good way to express and explore all your different feelings about the miscarriage.
- Join a bereavement support group. You might also consider becoming a volunteer to support other parents who've experienced a miscarriage.
- Avoid alcohol and other drugs and any behaviour that makes you feel numb. If you push away your feelings of grief, it'll probably take you longer to grieve and heal.
- Join a gym, visit your local swimming pool or walk for a charity. Physical activity with clear goals can help you to work through your emotions and get your body strong.
- Cultivate and maintain a vegetable plot or a garden. This kind of activity can be soothing.
- Try regular massage. This kind of self-nurturing can help your body and your mind to heal.

### Trying for another pregnancy

Some couples are keen to try to get pregnant again after a miscarriage. Some might also feel pressured by family or friends to try for another baby as a way of 'moving on'.

But if you get pregnant again before you're physically or emotionally ready, it might not help your grief much at all. This is because the grieving period after miscarriage can take time and a lot of energy to recover from.

You might also feel a mix of different emotions, such as eagerness about another pregnancy, fear of another miscarriage, or both. Keep in mind that just as your body needs time to recover physically, your emotional reserves do too.

It can be helpful to discuss your physical and emotional readiness and any other concerns with your partner, doctor, midwife, friends or a support worker.

Health professionals recommend that you talk with your doctor about when it's OK to try again.



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### More to explore

- Miscarriage: a guide for men
- Stillbirth: a dad's story of loss
- Health problems in pregnancy

### Web links

- Sands Australia: miscarriage, stillbirth & newborn death support
- Pillars of Strength – Peer support and respite service for dads
- Pregnancy Loss Australia
- Beyond Blue – Pregnancy and early parenthood
- Fair Work Ombudsman – Personal, carer's and compassionate leave

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### Acknowledgements

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