

emotional wellbeing

prioritising mental wellbeing after pregnancy loss

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SUPPORT NETWORK



AN INTRODUCTION

Miscarrying a pregnancy brings with it a host of emotions. The grief reaction will vary for individual women and is often impacted by things like how long it took to fall pregnant, whether it was an IVF pregnancy, whether maternal age is a stressor, if it is a second, third or fourth miscarriage or even if it was your first attempt to begin a family. There is no one set of emotions or expected reaction to the experience of miscarriage. Everyone's situations are different and often because people around you don't even know you are pregnant it is hard to talk about the loss and to ask for or receive support.

This is one of the factors that disenfranchises the grief that surrounds miscarriage. As such it is often not until you start to talk to people that you will realise how common it is, with most women having had or closely knowing someone who has had a miscarriage.

Sharing your experience and talking about your loss can be very helpful and can assist you to process some of the emotions that you are feeling.



EMOTIONS

Losing a pregnancy (and your hopes and dreams for that baby) brings with it a range of emotions. Some of these may include numbness, shock, confusion, sadness, fatigue, apathy, oversensitivity, anxiety, vulnerability, fear, panic, restlessness, impatience, irritability, yearning and jealousy.

This list is by no means exhaustive and you may find that you feel all, some, or none of these emotions in varying degrees.

Emotions may vary from day to day and often women describe themselves as feeling like they are in a spin cycle in a washing machine. It can be common to have good days and then bad days, which can confuse people as they may have thought they were getting 'better' and then after a bad day feel like they are 'worse'.

Good and bad days are part of the process of healing and will often be impacted by what else is going on for you at the time.



HOW TO CARE FOR YOURSELF AFTER A MISCARRIAGE

Miscarriage, like any other stressful and difficult life event, can require you to take extra care of yourself. Women often ask me what they can do to feel better or help themselves get through the experience.

Listed below are a few ideas that can be helpful.

- **Talk** about the experience you have had, whether it is to a close friend or family member, your partner or a health professional. Talking about what happened can be helpful to process the experience. Friends and family may not want to ask for fear of upsetting you. It is ok to bring it up with them yourself and to say, "I'm struggling". Let them know that you are not ok.
 - **Accept practical support** from people especially in the early days where you may still be feeling the physical effects of the miscarriage.
 - **Allow yourself time** to not be ok and if possible take some time off work. It can be hard to put on a professional face when inside you are feeling devastated. The amount of time off will vary with some people finding a few days or a week is enough, while others need an extended break.
 - **Care for yourself physically.** It is important to sleep well, to eat well and in time to exercise. Sleep can often be disrupted as you are kept awake by thoughts going around in your head. Some women find it helpful to keep a pen and paper next to their bed so they can get the thoughts out of their head and onto paper. Doing some mindfulness or meditation can also be helpful to calm your mind and bring on sleep. There are numerous mindfulness and meditation Apps available to download.
 - Some people find it helpful to have a **ceremony to mark the miscarriage**. This is not right for everybody but if it resonates with you it can be an important part of the grieving and healing process. Some people name the baby they have lost.
 - For some, thinking about and **planning for another pregnancy** straight away can be helpful and for others having a time out from conceiving, and or doing anything related to pregnancy may be what they need.
 - It can be **tricky to navigate social gatherings** when being around pregnant women and babies is the last thing that you feel like. It is ok to say 'No' to gatherings, parties or events that you don't want to go to. Miscarriage can rock your self-confidence and you may not feel up to socialising. Let people know that you are not up to attending - most people will understand that you are going through a difficult time particularly if you tell them.
 - **Plan for celebrations** like Christmas and Easter in advance. If you have to attend large gatherings then allow time on either side to just be and to allow yourself to feel what you need to feel.
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There is no set time for grieving miscarriage but most people will find that as time goes on they begin to feel better and have more good days than bad. Being surrounded with good support can assist the process of healing and often if you have other children around it can be easier to move on as there is simply less time to focus on yourself.

For some people though this is not the case and you may find that you are still struggling after some time has passed. Having some professional counselling support can be helpful then. If your miscarriage occurred in a medical setting, the hospital social worker may be able to provide you with support.

There are also organisations like *RedNose*, *SANDS* and *Bears of Hope* that have bereavement support lines and offer both group and individual counselling.



Psychologists and grief practitioners can also support you through miscarriage helping you as you navigate your way through the journey. It is important to recognise that you need help and to reach out.

Remember to be kind to yourself. The aftermath of miscarriage can be a very sad and often lonely time. If you are struggling, reach out; if you need a doona day, have one; if you need to cry a river, do so; if you need to scream and rage do, just don't hurt yourself or anyone else.

The most important and final bit of advice is to know that it won't always feel this way. It may feel like the sadness and pain will never lift... just know that it will. If, however, it continues to feel overwhelming, seek professional help or see your GP for an assessment.

Find more resources online at pinkelephants.org.au



remember

if you have had a miscarriage...

IT'S OK

It's OK to feel completely devastated

It's OK to hide away from well-meaning family and friends and give yourself space to process and grieve your loss. You have not only lost your baby but also all the hopes and dreams that you had for them.

It's OK to be jealous of anyone who has a baby or announces a new pregnancy

It's OK to have days where you cry, even a few months after the miscarriage

It's OK to feel temporarily disconnected from your other children

It's OK to grieve differently to your partner

It's OK to get ridiculously angry for no reason at all

It's OK to feel like you need to control every other aspect of your life

It's OK to question why this happened to you

It's OK to lose your confidence in other areas of your life

It's OK to feel like a failure as a woman

It's OK to believe that you will never have a baby

It's OK to be obsessed with conceiving another baby

It's OK to never want to try and have another baby

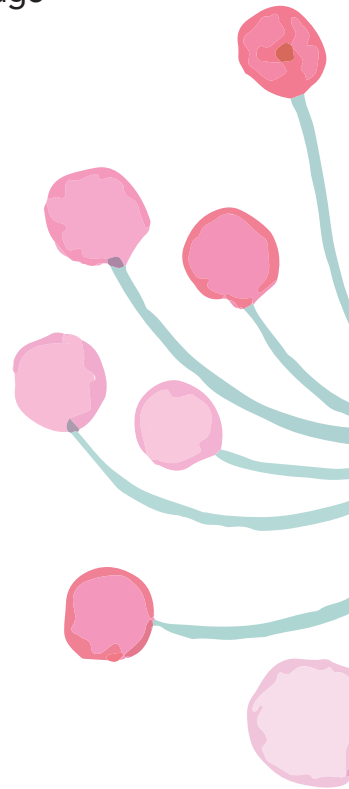
It's OK to want to obsessively hold and cuddle other people's babies

It's OK to not want to even look at anyone else's baby

It's OK to want someone to guarantee that it will never happen again

It's OK to feel completely out of control when no-one can do this

It's OK to feel none of the above and to move on from the experience with little effect to your life



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