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Caring for Yourself After Early Loss

A Resource for Families

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Caring For Yourself After Early Loss

Early Pregnancy Loss - Information to Help You Cope

Please read this information when you feel ready. You do not need to read it all at once. You may want to come back to different sections when you feel ready. We hope that it will help you.

Feelings About Pregnancy and Loss

When you find out you are pregnant, the emotional response can be very different for each person. Pregnancies can be highly desired, may have taken a long time to achieve or sometimes they are unexpected. Sometimes there is a partner involved and sometimes there is not. Your partner's response during a loss may be the same as yours, or it may be very different.

Pregnancy loss (miscarriage and ectopic pregnancy) is most common in the first three months of pregnancy. You may have chosen not to tell friends and family, or you may have told many. The emotional response to loss can be very different for each person. Some people feel grief and isolation, while others may feel relief. It is important to pay attention to your mental health following your pregnancy loss.

After Your Loss

After a pregnancy loss, you need to recover both physically and emotionally. The physical recovery may be faster than the emotional recovery. This is a time for you to take care of yourself. Most of the time, there is no known reason for the pregnancy loss, and we encourage you to let go of guilt and blame. Let others know what you do and do not need to help you heal during this time.

It is okay to avoid events that trigger strong emotions such as family gatherings or baby showers while you are healing. Most people who are grieving will go through distinct stages of grief. Be compassionate towards yourself, your partner and others. It can be helpful to connect with people who can support you through this time. Friends, family, or caring professionals can be very helpful.

We hope that having some information helps you cope with the loss of your pregnancy. Please ask your healthcare provider if you would like more information, more resources, or if you would like to speak with a medical social worker. We are here to help you through this process.



Image by FreePik

Emotions and Grieving

As a person who is experiencing a loss, your body will go through intense hormonal changes, which can make your emotional response stronger than usual. You may find yourself experiencing anger, sadness, guilt, concern, anxiety, loneliness, disbelief, fear, and numbness. All of these feelings are valid and normal. They are part of the grieving process. The time following your pregnancy loss can be full of ups and downs. Feelings can remain strong for several months or longer. There are six stages of grieving, but not everyone experiences them in this order, and you may not experience all six. **We share these stages of grief with you to help normalize and validate what you might experience or feel during this time of loss and grief.**

Stages of Grief

1. Shock

At this point, the loss has not “sunk in”. Things feel unreal, almost like you are watching a movie or an event in someone else’s life. You may feel numb, tired, or tearful.

2. Denial

Denial is when you know something has happened, but your mind has a hard time believing it to be true. It is hard to go from being pregnant and expecting a baby to having a pregnancy loss. Sometimes, when people are in denial, they push away everything connected with their loss or begin to have obsessive daydreaming. To keep the uncomfortable feelings away, some may turn to things that numb their feelings, like alcohol or drugs, or plan a non-stop social schedule. All of these things may cover up the pain for a while, but they do not get rid of the pain.

3. Anger

You may feel angry with yourself or your family, or you may experience a spiritual crisis. You may feel short-tempered and irritable. Try to express your anger in healthy ways, such as talking, exercising, punching pillows, or writing about your angry feelings. It is important to let your anger out in a healthy way. Bottled-up anger and frustration will hurt your body, spirit, and mind.

4. Guilt and Bargaining

Whenever major life events occur, we often wonder, “What if?”. You may find yourself questioning your decisions or feeling guilty about the choices you have made. When we feel guilt, we sometimes try to resolve the situation by bargaining with a higher power.

5. Depression

When you realize that avoiding it or trying to change it is not working, you may go through a time of depression. You may understand that you had no control over preventing the loss. You may pull away from loved ones and feel alone in your feelings. You might think no one understands what you are going through or can help you feel better. You may cry often and feel sadness, hopelessness, and deep tiredness.

6. Acceptance

Acceptance happens as you learn to cope with the reality of the death and loss. When this happens, you will start to feel some normal energy come back. You may begin to feel interested in life again and take steps to find closure about what has happened. Coping with loss is a very personal experience, and it is different for everyone.

What stage of grief am I in?

Take Time to Grieve

Your family or partner may be grieving. They may try to stay strong to support you. They may show their grief at a different time and in a different way than you do. There are many ways to deal with grief. Here are some suggestions:

- Spend quality time with your partner and family.
- Talk to others. Let your friends know how you feel. Tell them what you need.
- Seek out others who have had an experience similar to your own.
- Talk with a counsellor, social worker, or a support group.
- Take time to grieve. Do not avoid thinking about your loss.
- Consider delaying major decisions until you have taken some time to heal and grieve.
- Keep a journal. Write down your thoughts and feelings in a story or poem.
- Eat a balanced diet, get enough sleep, and exercise under the direction of your physician
- Avoid drugs and alcohol.
- Do not expect yourself to “just get over it”. Give yourself time and space to grieve.
- Spend time with friends and family members who support you.
- Hold a private ceremony or create a personal ritual you can do on the anniversary of your loss.
- Take time to look at mementos, if you have them, and take time to reflect on your experience.
- Set realistic goals for yourself.
- As you heal, you may want to share your experiences. This can help others.

[Stages of Grief](#)



[Canada.ca](#)



[Saskatchewan Health Authority](#)



Maternal Mental Health

It is important to take care of your mental health after a pregnancy loss. Some feelings are normal, but others may mean you need extra support.

The information below explains some common mental health concerns.

The “Blues”

After your loss, there is a drastic change in your hormones. This can contribute to feelings of sadness, crying, mood swings, and anxiety. You may also feel tired, have trouble sleeping, or have trouble thinking clearly. It is important to know that while hormones can affect your mood, your grief and sadness are real and come from the pain of your loss. Even as your hormones slowly return to normal, your feelings of grief may remain strong for a while. Be patient and kind to yourself as your body and heart heal.

Depression

Depression is an expected part of the grieving process; however, it is important to recognize that people who experience pregnancy loss are at risk for postpartum depression. Postpartum depression is more serious than the “blues”. Postpartum depression can last up to one year following the loss. It can affect you in many different ways, such as feeling tired and listless, having sleeping problems, always eating or not eating at all, losing interest in the things you used to enjoy, and feeling sad and hopeless. Experiencing anxiety can also be a symptom of depression.

Anxiety

Anxiety can occur following the loss. People may experience feelings of worry, irritability, or restlessness. The symptoms may also be physical, like feeling tired, having headaches, or muscle tension.

What can you do?

- Talk about your feelings with your partner or a trusted friend.
- Speak with a counsellor or support group.
- Stay away from stressful situations, if possible.
- Get lots of rest and do only what needs to be done.
- Take breaks and accept help from others.
- Cry when you need to. It can be healing.
- Do something nice for yourself every day.
- Go for a short walk, either indoors or outdoors. Moving your body helps it process the emotions.
- Participate in activities that you find relaxing.

It is important to surround yourself with support. If you feel you are not coping well and/or thinking of hurting yourself or others, call your healthcare provider or HealthLine 811 right away. It is important to seek help. Postpartum depression can be treated.

Thoughts and feelings I am having:

Reaction of Friends and Family

Your friends and family may also have feelings about your pregnancy loss. If you have supportive people in your life, you may find it helpful to spend time with them. Being around people who care about you can help during this time. They may want to show their care and comfort you. You may notice that people react in different ways. Even when people mean well, they may not know how to show their care or what to say.

You may notice that some of your close friends avoid you or do not talk about your loss when they see you. Sometimes people may say things that feel hurtful, even when they are trying to help. They may not know what to say. If this happens, you may find it helpful to share your feelings with someone you trust who cares about you.

As time passes, you may feel that others have moved on, while you are still grieving. The people in your life may get busy and not realize that you still need support. Do not be afraid to ask for help. The people around you cannot read your mind. Let them know what you need so they can support you.

After Care and Healing

While you are healing emotionally, your body is also healing. The information below is to help you know what to expect physically.

Vaginal Bleeding

Following delivery, bleeding and discharge from the vagina are normal. They are usually small to moderate amounts and can last for two to six weeks. During this time, do not use tampons. Use pads instead and change them often to stay comfortable and clean.

In the first three days, your bleeding will be bright to dark red. You may notice that your bleeding increases when you stand up or move around. You may pass small loonie-sized blood clots during this time. As your uterus heals, the colour of your bleeding changes to pink or brown-tinged and will become lighter.

Managing Discomfort and Pain

- Rest as much as possible.
- Your healthcare provider will make suggestions about the best medications to take for pain and discomfort. These are usually anti-inflammatory medications.

Health Care Follow Up

You may arrange to see your healthcare provider six to eight weeks after leaving the hospital. Write down any questions you may have before the visit. It will help you remember what you want to discuss. Your healthcare provider may:

- Check that your physical healing has been normal.
- Go over the details of your pregnancy. Reports may be available for review, and your healthcare provider may be able to give you more information.
- Discuss birth control options and help you select the method that is most suitable for you.
- Talk with you about your grief process. If the process has been delayed, your healthcare provider can assist you.

Warning Signs After Your Loss



If you have one or more of the following symptoms, call your healthcare provider, HealthLine 811, or go to the nearest Maternal Care Centre or the Emergency Department

Bleeding:

- Increased bright red and/or heavy vaginal bleeding (soaking one sanitary pad every hour for four hours)
- Passing large clots from your vagina (toonie-sized or bigger)
- Bleeding that lasts longer than six weeks

Infection:

- Chills and fever(body temperatures of 38° C / 100.4° F or higher)
- Bad smelling vaginal fluids or discharge
- Bad cramps or a sore abdomen that keeps getting worse
- Burning or stinging when you pee or difficulty to pee



Pain:

- Pain in your chest
- Pain in one or both legs
- Severe or constant pain in your abdomen (belly) that is getting worse and is not going away
- An increase in pain around your vagina, perineum, or lower stomach
- Sudden severe headache with or without dizziness and blurred vision

Other:

- Feeling unwell
- Difficulty breathing or feeling like you cannot catch your breath for no known reason
- Fainting or dizziness
- Red, uncomfortable, or swollen legs
- Problems seeing, such as blurred vision or spots in your eyes
- Not coping well
- Thinking of hurting yourself or others

Return of your Period

It is hard to predict when you will get your period back. Your first period may be heavier, have more clots, and last longer than normal. Your period can be irregular for a few months.

It is possible to get pregnant after having sex, even if your period has not returned.

Sex and Birth Control

Grieving your loss can affect your readiness for sex. You can have sex again when you are physically healed and emotionally ready. It is important that you talk about sex and birth control with your partner and healthcare provider. **When you are ready for birth control, talk with your healthcare provider or check out these resources for more information:**

itsaplan.ca



[Sexlifesask.ca](https://sexlifesask.ca)



Another Pregnancy

In the future, you may want to get pregnant again, and you may receive advice from friends, family, and healthcare providers. Only you can make a decision and know when the time is right. Below are some general guidelines to help you make that decision:

- Take time to recover from your recent pregnancy. Let your body return to its non-pregnant state. Taking care of your physical wellbeing will support your recovery.
- Take time for **emotional healing** and grieve your loss. Being pregnant at the same time you are grieving a loss can be very stressful.
- Take time to seek medical advice. Having additional information about how your body is coping and healing can help ease worries about your next pregnancy. Do not be afraid to ask your healthcare provider questions.
- You do not need to make any major decisions right away. It may help to wait until you have had time to heal. You may feel more satisfied with your decision once your thoughts and feelings have started to settle.

Health and Wellness

Nutrition

It is important to eat well. The right food choices will give you energy, prevent constipation, and help you maintain good health.

- Eat plenty of fruits and vegetables.
- Choose whole grain food options such as brown rice, brown bread, and whole grain pasta.
- Drink six to eight glasses (250 mL or 8 oz.) of fluid every day. Limit your number of sugary drinks each day.

[Canada's Food Guide](#)



Rest and Sleep

Rest is important for your physical health and emotional wellbeing. Your body needs rest and proper care to help you restore your strength and energy.

- Rest as much as possible
- Accept help from others and ask for help when you need it
- Let minor household tasks wait
- Try not to take on extra tasks

Exercise

Exercise can help reduce stress, give you more energy, and may help you feel better. Exercise can tone your muscles and promote healing. Make regular exercise a part of your life. Walking is a great way to exercise. Start slowly and increase the length of your walks as you regain energy.

Ask your healthcare provider about the best way to get back to regular exercise. Stay away from **heavy** exercise until six weeks after your loss.

Where to Find Help

Getting your life back in order after your loss is often not easy. You may be overwhelmed with the physical and emotional reactions you have experienced. You may lack the motivation to work through your grief, or you might not know where to start. You are not alone. There are professionals available to help you understand and help you to cope with your feelings. See below for a list of community resources and websites.

Hospital Resources

Medical Social Worker

Families may receive help from a Social Worker if there is availability at your facility. These professionals can help with a range of issues such as:

- Applying for leave from work
- Applying for benefit reimbursement
- Counselling while still in hospital
- General coping
- Linking you to your local community resources
- Food vouchers and transportation assistance

Spiritual Care

Whether or not you have been part of a religious or spiritual group in the past, you may find yourself looking for answers or support. You can seek support through a spiritual or cultural leader or ask hospital staff for spiritual care contact information.

First Nation and Métis Health Services

You may have the option to receive a visit from Indigenous-focused members of the healthcare team, such as Navigators and Indigenous Birth Support Workers, if available at your site. Their purpose is to provide an integrated and culturally respectful approach to your care and help you navigate the healthcare system. Notify your nurse if you would like a visit from First Nation and Métis Health Services.

Community Resources and Websites

Your Current Healthcare Provider

If you require healthcare services or support, talk to your doctor, nurse, midwife, or social worker.

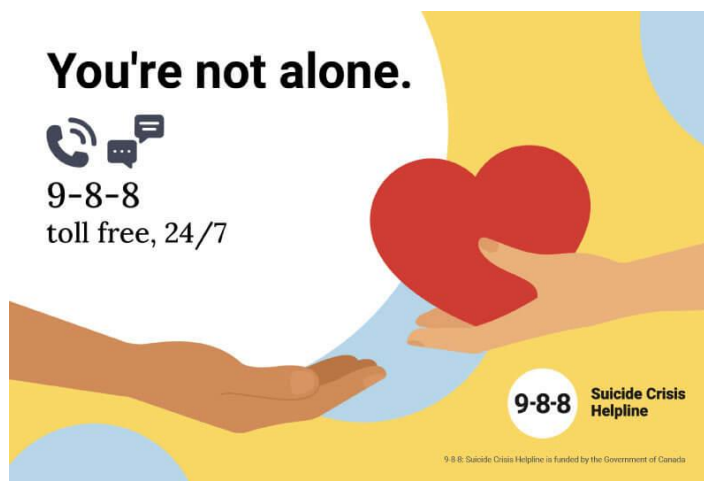
HealthLine 811

24-hour professional health advice and information line. **Dial 811 from any phone.**



Suicide Crisis Helpline 988

A safe space to talk, 24 hours a day, any day of the year. **Dial or Text 988.**



Downloadable 9-8-8 poster shared from <https://988.ca/get-involved>

For More Information on Community Resources and websites, scan the QR codes or call.

<u>Caring Hearts SK</u> Offers a variety of support groups and individual counselling for grief. 	<u>Counselling Connect Saskatchewan</u> Helping people find the right support in times of need through free access to rapid counselling sessions. 
<u>Domestic Violence Help Line</u> 1-888-338-0880	<u>Employee Family Assistance Programs</u> Some Employers offer an Employee Family Assistance Program, inquire with your employer. May offer counselling services or other assistance programs.
<u>Empty Arms</u> Empty Arms Perinatal Loss Support Services is a charity that supports those experiencing the loss of a child from pregnancy through early childhood. 	<u>Moms & Kids Health Saskatchewan</u> A health care resource for moms and kids in Saskatchewan, supporting their health and well-being as close to home as possible. 
<u>PATHS</u> A list of Domestic Violence Emergency Shelters in Saskatchewan. 	<u>Pregnancy & Infant Loss</u> Help people connect to support after infertility, pregnancy loss, or infant loss. 

Public Health Nurses

A list of clinics throughout the province.



The Love Loss Project

Shining light on pregnancy and child loss.



Shelter Safe

An online resource for women and their children seeking safety from violence and abuse.



The Caring Place

Phone: 306-347-CARE (2273) Individual and Family Counselling.



The Compassionate Friends of Canada

A non-profit, non-denominational, self-help organization, offering friendship, understanding, grief education and HOPE for the future to all families who have experienced the death of a child at any age, from any cause. Link/QR takes you to Saskatchewan Chapter.



Return to Zero: H.O.P.E

RTZ HOPE provides compassionate and holistic support for people who have experienced unimaginable loss during their journey to parenthood.



Twinkle Star Project

Providing meaningful support to families experiencing pregnancy and baby loss.



211 Saskatchewan

Connect with resources in your community offers a database of over 6,000 community, social, non-clinical health, and government services across our province.





CS-PIER-0374

Healthy People, Healthy Saskatchewan

The Saskatchewan Health Authority works in the spirit of truth and reconciliation, acknowledging Saskatchewan as the traditional territory of First Nations and Métis People.

PIER – Patient Information and Education Resources

AUGUST 2026