



Understanding & Recovering From Early Pregnancy Loss

*If you find yourself dealing with a miscarriage, it is **important to take good care of yourself** physically and mentally. That includes making sure you deal with your miscarriage however you feel most comfortable.*

Early pregnancy loss is far more common than most people think. They occur in 15-25% of known pregnancies. About 75% of early losses occur before 12 weeks gestation.

Miscarriage or early pregnancy loss means that a pregnancy ends long before the baby was sufficiently developed. You were able to get pregnant, but something happened early in pregnancy to cause the development to stop. **While miscarriage is common, your pregnancy loss is still unique to you.**

UNDERSTANDING EARLY PREGNANCY LOSS

Early pregnancy loss can occur suddenly or take days to weeks. It may be discovered through ultrasound, or you may have developed symptoms such as bleeding/cramping. The pain you feel with a miscarriage is the uterus contracting and the cervix opening.

- The major cause of early pregnancy loss in the first 13 weeks of pregnancy is **random, genetic errors** which results in incorrect development of the baby. **These are NOT preventable.** Most genetic errors do not repeat themselves.
- Another common cause of early pregnancy loss is called “anembryonic pregnancy”, or an **egg that develops abnormally**. In this instance, the egg could produce a placenta, but no embryo. This is also not preventable, but this problem is unlikely to be repeated.
- **Ectopic pregnancy** is another form of early pregnancy loss. An ectopic (or tubal) pregnancy occurs when the egg becomes fertilized, but it remains in the fallopian tube and starts developing there. The tube is very small and cannot stretch far enough to contain a growing baby. An ectopic pregnancy can be life-threatening to the mother and needs to be removed either via surgery or medications. It is very important after having an ectopic pregnancy that you notify your clinician when you become pregnant again. You should be monitored in the case that you have another ectopic pregnancy.

Most often no cause for a miscarriage is found. Testing to try to determine a cause is usually not done until after 2 or 3 consecutive early pregnancy losses because testing doesn't provide valuable information. Many women who have 1 or 2 miscarriages go on to have normal pregnancies in the future.

PHYSICAL RECOVERY

Common physical symptoms: Whether you miscarried spontaneously, required medications, or had a procedure called a dilation and curettage (D&C) to ensure the uterus is empty, the body takes weeks to return to normal. Uterine cramping may persist for several days and vaginal bleeding for up to three weeks. Some physical reactions may occur after early pregnancy loss. Heart palpitations, fatigue, problems sleeping, loss of appetite, inability to concentrate, headaches, and withdrawal from social activities are common grief reactions, but you may consider counseling to help cope with your grief process. It is common for pregnancy tests to remain positive for several weeks after the miscarriage. You do not need to wait until a pregnancy test is negative to start birth control. If another pregnancy is not desired, it is best to begin using contraception right away.

Symptoms requiring immediate medical care: Heavy bleeding, foul vaginal discharge, or a fever can be signs of infection and should be **reported to clinic promptly**.

Rest after early pregnancy loss: Pelvic rest is advised until vaginal bleeding resolves following a completed miscarriage. This also means nothing should enter the vagina while experiencing vaginal bleeding (i.e., no tampons, sex toys, or vaginal sex). You are encouraged to speak with your clinician about convalescent leave or physical fitness test exemption until you are recovered.

Family Planning: Before resuming sexual activity, if contraception is desired, you can immediately begin using the protection of your choice. Consider using the mobile application [Decide + Be Ready](#) to determine the best contraception method for you. If another pregnancy is desired, there is no reason to delay trying to conceive. However, waiting until after your next period will assist with dating the pregnancy, which may reduce stress around an unknown conception date. If you choose to wait until after your next period, use condoms during intercourse until your next period.

EMOTIONAL RECOVERY

Navigating complex feelings: There are many ways to react to an early pregnancy loss. You may be devastated; you may mourn deeply; you may be relieved because you did not want to be pregnant. You may be overwhelmed, or you may bounce back and forth between emotions. All these reactions are normal. Sometimes grief can sneak up later. Some may mourn the lost pregnancy for months or even years later. Some may never grieve. Some parents are hurt by the response of others not respecting their pregnancy loss experience. Some parents avoid friends who are pregnant or have children, because it is too painful to be around.

Your partner's experience: Partners may experience intense emotions when their partner miscarries. Common feelings include uselessness, powerlessness, helplessness, disbelief, anger, frustration, or guilt. If fathers are able to tell their partners how they are reacting, it will reassure the mother that the father is sharing the loss experience.

Click below for more resources:

- Miscarriage management resources through [Training, Education & Advocacy in Miscarriage Management \(TEAMM\)](#)
- Questions about pregnancy loss through [The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists](#)
- Grieving support during perinatal loss through [Angel Babies](#)
- Early miscarriage support through [Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists](#)
- Non-medical counseling through [Military OneSource](#) and [Fleet & Family Support Center](#)
- Local support groups through [SHARE: Pregnancy and Infant Loss Support, Inc.](#),
- Online support groups for pregnancy loss through [Postpartum Support International](#)