

LOSING A BABY WITHOUT LOSING HOPE

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On the night of June 7, just as I began my eleventh week of pregnancy with our fourth child, I learned my baby had died. The weeks that followed presented one of the greatest challenges to my physical, emotional, social, and spiritual well-being I have ever known. I discovered that this pain was something I couldn't handle alone.

Hope for Physical Healing

The length of your pregnancy, your health prior to miscarriage, and whether or not you had surgery or complications will determine how well you feel following a miscarriage. Take these important steps to care for yourself.

Ask questions. I left the hospital late at night after being told my baby was a blighted ovum. I didn't know what that meant and I was too stunned to ask questions. Later, I found answers by researching on the Internet and talking with my doctor and nurses. I learned that my miscarriage, like most, was probably due to a chromosomal problem that was unlikely to recur.

After a miscarriage, women often ask their doctors what caused the miscarriage and when they can try to conceive again. Although a specific cause can be identified in only half of miscarriages, ask your doctor about testing fetal tissue. Even if you do not want such information now, you may decide you want it in the future.

Doctors vary greatly in their recommendations of when it is safe to try to conceive following a miscarriage. Ask your doctor if there are medical concerns that prohibit trying again right away.

Share your feelings about if and when you would like to try to conceive again. Keep asking questions until you are satisfied that you know all that you can.

Rest. After the miscarriage, I slept longer and asked my husband to handle more of the household tasks and childcare so I could recuperate. You may want to ask for a short break from work and other responsibilities. Accept offers of help with meals and childcare.

Eat well. Eating was the last thing I wanted to do. A decreased appetite is normal while in mourning, but begin eating well-balanced meals again as soon as possible. Prenatal vitamins may be another reminder of your loss, but taking them is important to physical recovery.

Exercise. Walking while listening to music helped me feel normal again. I used the time alone to pray and cry. Exercising helps combat fatigue and strengthens you to endure the grieving process.

Hope for Emotional Healing

I had grieved before, but grieving a miscarriage was harder. I describe it now as PMS times 100—dramatic hormone changes and deep sadness at the same time. Many women grieve a year or longer and most say that miscarriage has changed them forever. Here are some ways to care for yourself emotionally.

Cry. Tears are God's gift. I cried often after I lost my baby, and it helped me release my sadness, disappointment, and anger. Tears mean that we believe life, no matter how brief, is precious.

Express anger safely. I was surprised at how angry I felt. I was angry that miscarriage had happened to me, that I couldn't just "get over it," that I no longer felt in control.

Anger is a normal part of grieving. Beating a pillow, talking about it, and writing out my feelings helped release my anger. Find a way that works for you: exercise, rip up an old phone book, or play a musical instrument.

I also wrote a letter to my doctor suggesting ways he and his staff could better support patients who miscarried, because writing that letter used my pain in a positive way to help others.

Care for yourself. Women who miscarry often feel poorly about themselves, especially if the miscarriage follows a period of infertility. I felt that everyone who knew about my miscarriage pitied me and I felt like my body had let me down.

Although I didn't feel like doing it, I kept dressing nicely and wearing makeup. I also kept up most of my regular routines. Do things that make you feel good about who you are. You are not a failure!

Hope for Spiritual Healing

The greatest spiritual challenges of miscarriage for me were guilt and wanting to know why God let my baby die. I have three precious little boys and I had hoped for a girl. I wondered if God was punishing me for an inappropriate desire or if I had done something else to cause this heartbreak. Responding to your spiritual needs is an important part of caring for yourself.

Let go of guilt. Feelings of guilt are normal following a miscarriage— even though there is no evidence that intercourse, exercise, or what a mother eats, drinks, or feels about the baby causes miscarriage. I understand that I didn't do anything to cause this miscarriage, but I know that I have done plenty of things to feel guilty about. God invites us to let go of the guilt by admitting what we have done wrong, and he promises to forgive us because of his son, Jesus.

Focus on God's promises.

I don't know why you and I lost our babies. But I know that God loves us and loves our babies. I know that God will never leave you or me alone.

Jesus, God's son, became human so that we would know him. He suffered loss and pain just like we have. He understands our sadness. He doesn't answer all our questions, but he knows the depths of our grief and walks beside us as we heal. He will comfort you as you pray and read the Bible. I know that he has plans for us—plans not to harm us, but plans to give us a hope and a future. I also know that through our faith in Jesus, God will make something good come out of our pain.

Talk with a pastor. Talking with my pastor after my baby died was reassuring. You may have some spiritual questions related to your miscarriage that a caring pastor could discuss with you. If you don't have a pastor or a church home, **Lutheran Media Ministry** can help find one near you. Call them at 1800 353 350.

Hope for Social Healing

One of the most painful parts of miscarriage for me was the inappropriate things people said. I was told:

"God wanted it this way."

"You wouldn't want a disabled child."

"It's all for the best."

Noticing my sadness, someone asked, "Is it just the miscarriage thing?" Miscarriage left me feeling angry, jealous, and alone. This was a difficult part of recovery for me, but taking these steps helped.

Educate and forgive. I had to learn that no one said these things to hurt me. My loss made people uncomfortable and they wanted to make the grief go away. In a couple of tearful conversations with friends, I explained why their statements hurt and how much I needed to be with friends and family who would listen.

I remembered times when I was not as sensitive to others' grief as I could have been. I knew that God had forgiven me for hurtful things I'd said and done, and that he wanted me to extend the favor. I found restored relationships when I forgave others as God has forgiven me.

Talk to your husband. I did not understand why my husband did not seem as upset as I was about our baby. He seemed fully recovered in 24 hours! He supported me for several days, but suggested that I "better be over it" in two weeks. When he mentioned that we might not try to conceive again, I felt like our loss didn't matter to him.

Tell your husband about what is happening to you physically and emotionally. Understanding what you are going through can help him be supportive. There is no "right" way to grieve and you will not grieve in the same way.

Talk about how you could memorialize your child. My husband and I have chosen an ornament for our Christmas tree in memory of our baby.

Get support from women who have miscarried. I was amazed at the number of women I knew who had suffered a miscarriage. Talking with them, getting support online, and reading books by women who knew my pain helped me. Call your local hospital to find out if there is a support group near you.

I still miss my baby. Finding physical, emotional, spiritual, and social healing has not been easy, but God has been faithful in providing for me. My husband and I are now happily expecting a child on June 7th—a year from the day I miscarried.

We have lost babies and we have suffered. But with God, we do not have to lose hope.

For more support, go to www.messagesofhope.org.au/miscarriage.

Messages of hope
www.messagesofhope.org.au

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