

# UNDERSTANDING MISCARRIAGE

Miscarriages are common experiences during pregnancy. In Australia, a miscarriage is the loss of a pregnancy before 20 weeks gestation. In Australia, statistics on miscarriage are not collected so it's difficult to know exactly how common it is.

Sometimes a miscarriage happens when a woman isn't aware she is pregnant or believes it to be a late period. We know that miscarriages occur in at least 15% of confirmed pregnancies. The actual miscarriage rate is likely to be much higher – we estimate it to be around 1 in 4 pregnancies. Based on these rates and the number of births each year, we estimate around 285 miscarriages occur every day in Australia.



Miscarriage impacts  
around 1 in 4  
pregnancies

## Early miscarriage

An early miscarriage is one that happens in the first 12 weeks of pregnancy (first trimester). Around 85% of miscarriages occur in the first trimester of pregnancy.

## Late miscarriage

Late miscarriage refers to a pregnancy loss between 13-20 weeks gestation or in the second trimester of pregnancy. Sometimes definitions differ slightly. Pregnancy loss occurring in the second trimester is much less common, occurring in 1 to 2 in 100 women.

## Stillbirth

Stillbirth is the loss of a pregnancy after 20 weeks. In Australia, six babies are stillborn every day.

## Recurrent miscarriage

In Australia, recurrent miscarriage is currently defined as 3 or more miscarriages in a row. Around 1-2% of women experience recurrent miscarriage.



## WHAT TYPES OF MISCARRIAGE ARE THERE?

Several different types of miscarriages can happen. Your doctor or specialist may mention that you have experienced one of these types of miscarriages.

### BLIGHTED OVUM/ANEMBRYONIC PREGNANCY

A blighted ovum is when a fertilised egg implants in the womb (uterus), but an embryo does not develop. Pregnancy symptoms may be present early on but diminish over time.

### COMPLETE MISCARRIAGE

A complete miscarriage means that your body has passed all the pregnancy tissue. Symptoms usually involve heavy vaginal bleeding, intense abdominal pain, and cramping, which may decrease after the pregnancy tissues have passed. If you think you may have had a complete miscarriage, you must see your doctor or midwife check that all the pregnancy tissue has passed.

### ECTOPIC PREGNANCY AND PREGNANCY OF UNKNOWN LOCATIONS

An ectopic pregnancy is when the fertilised egg implants outside the womb and is usually treated as an emergency. It usually occurs in one of the fallopian tubes. Symptoms include pain and cramping in the lower abdomen, vaginal bleeding, feeling dizzy, fainting, or nausea.

### INCOMPLETE MISCARRIAGE

An incomplete miscarriage occurs when some but not all of the pregnancy tissue has passed. Vaginal bleeding and intense cramping or abdominal pain will happen and may continue as your body tries to empty the remaining pregnancy tissues from the body. You may require medication or surgical treatment to remove any remaining tissue. The surgical treatment is commonly known as Dilation and Curettage (D&C).

### INEVITABLE MISCARRIAGE

An inevitable miscarriage may include heavy bleeding, intense abdominal cramps, and pain. The cervix dilates, and miscarriage is inevitable.

### MISSED OR SILENT MISCARRIAGE

A missed miscarriage or a silent miscarriage is when the embryo or foetus has died but remains in the womb (uterus). You may experience some vaginal discharge that is brown coloured, and your usual pregnancy symptoms may become less noticeable. It is normal to have no symptoms, and you may find out that you have miscarried during a routine check.

*“It’s not fair, for the second one [miscarriage], when some people have never had any. You know it was more that thing of the unfairness of having a second one”.*

### **MOLAR PREGNANCY**

Molar pregnancies can be complete or incomplete and result from chromosomal abnormalities. With a complete molar pregnancy, no foetus develops. A partial or incomplete molar pregnancy results in both an abnormal foetus and placenta, but the foetus is non – viable, and a full-term pregnancy is not possible. They usually result in miscarriage in the first three months.

Molar pregnancy symptoms may include larger than expected abdominal growth. Some women may experience no symptoms and discovered on routine ultrasounds.

### **RECURRENT MISCARRIAGE**

Recurrent miscarriage refers to 3 or more consecutive miscarriages. 1-3% of Australian women will experience recurrent miscarriages.

You can find out more about recurrent miscarriage on our website.



### **SEPTIC MISCARRIAGE (INFECTION)**

A septic miscarriage is a miscarriage associated with a uterine infection. Abnormal discharge or having a temperature may be signs of a septic miscarriage.

### **THREATENED MISCARRIAGE**

A threatened miscarriage is when your body shows signs that you may miscarry. Symptoms can include bleeding, cramping, or abdominal pain. You may have an ultrasound that shows a slow heart rate or slower than expected growth. Threatened miscarriage signs may go away, and you can continue to have a healthy pregnancy if the cervix remains closed. Otherwise, threatened miscarriage will result in one of the other outcomes described here.

*“And I think I was quite shocked because no one in my family has ever had a miscarriage before, and there’s like 6 or 7 babies within my mum, you know, like immediate family, so I was the first one.”*

*“It’s much more common than I think. . . .people don’t talk about it.”*

## WHAT ARE THE SIGNS OF MISCARRIAGE?

Each woman will experience miscarriage differently. A missed miscarriage, for example, is common, and you may not even realise it has happened until you go for a routine antenatal appointment.

Unfortunately, once a miscarriage has begun, there is nothing you, your doctor, or other health professionals can do to stop it from happening.



**If you are experiencing heavy bleeding, severe cramping, and/or feel very unwell, please go to your local emergency department, or call 000 immediately.**

If you are concerned about your health or your baby's health at any point of your pregnancy or have any questions, contact your healthcare provider or one of the health information hotlines:

Health Direct on 1800 022 222 - Open 24/7 or, Pregnancy, Birth and Baby on 1800 882 436 – Open 7am to midnight (AET)

Here are 4 common symptoms of miscarriage:



### VAGINAL BLEEDING

The most common first sign of miscarriage is vaginal bleeding – this may be light bleeding or spotting through to heavy bleeding. About 1 in 4 women will experience bleeding during their first trimester. Not all bleeding signals an impending miscarriage. However, if you experience any bleeding during your pregnancy, seek medical attention as soon as possible.



### LOWER ABDOMINAL PAIN OR CRAMPING

Like vaginal bleeding, most women will experience lower abdominal pain or cramping. While some women experience severe cramping, others will feel pain similar to period/menstrual cramps.



## REDUCED INTENSITY OF PREGNANCY SYMPTOMS

Some women also say they no longer 'feel' pregnant. Their nausea may have stopped or reduced, or their breasts are no longer tender. These symptoms do not necessarily signal a miscarriage as they are often reduced or go away after the first trimester.



## ABNORMAL DISCHARGE OF FLUID OR TISSUE FROM YOUR VAGINA

Vaginal discharge that is yellow, green, red, brown, or grey, accompanied by a strong smell and itching, may be a sign of an infection or complications with your pregnancy.

In a miscarriage beyond six weeks, the expelled tissue may not be discernible from large blood clots. The tissue may be white, grey, or brown, visible with the clots.



Please remember that it is highly unlikely that you have done anything to cause a miscarriage. Experiencing a miscarriage can be very difficult and there are support services available if you are seeking help.

## WHERE CAN I FIND MORE INFORMATION?

Visit our website by scanning the QR code below or visit [miscarriageaustralia.com.au](https://miscarriageaustralia.com.au)

You can also find more information from your GP or the website of the hospital or clinic you will be attending



## WHERE CAN I FIND SUPPORT?

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