



YOUR EMOTIONS AFTER MISCARRIAGE

Before the loss, parents often begin to contemplate the changes and responsibilities that lie ahead in caring for a new baby. Many parents start to invest their hopes and expectations in the pregnancy, which often begins well before conception. The space created by miscarriage and the limited number of specific memories can make mourning the loss challenging and confusing. The baby is also not held in the minds and memories of family and friends the same way as a living baby. Family and friends may not even have known about the pregnancy.

People have a range of psychological reactions to miscarriage. This section can help you navigate the intricate feelings and thoughts following a miscarriage. Your feelings are understandable and have meaning. We encourage you to embrace and be curious about your feelings rather than critical or judgemental. There is no right or wrong way to feel. Not everyone who experiences miscarriage will feel sad; some may feel relieved or confused. Most likely, you will have many different feelings simultaneously, and your emotions are likely to change over time.

There is also no time limit upon grief. You may continue to experience feelings of grief and sadness for a long time – in some cases, longer than you and the people around you expect – which is very common. For many, it can take weeks, months, or even years before the grief starts to subside. It may never completely disappear, but instead, you evolve around it. Accessing care and support or help offered by others is essential during this time.



The emotions you may experience after a miscarriage can be very overwhelming. Please know that you are not alone and support services are available.

If you are in a crisis situation, please call Lifeline (13 11 14), Beyond Blue (1300 224 636), or 000 immediately.

COMMON FEELINGS AFTER A MISCARRIAGE

GRIEF AND SADNESS

Grief and sadness are shared emotions following a miscarriage. Sadness is a natural and expected feeling to experience. You are not only feeling sad about the loss of your baby, but also the loss of the future you imagined, and possibly feel sad that others are not providing you the support or reaction you expected.

I remember like it was just the worst time, it was terrible. Like we were just, I was grief stricken. Like I really, really struggled with that, like a lot. And I remember, yeah just crying every single day, and [partner] just didn't know what to do with me.

"...there was definitely a real sense of isolation. People don't understand, it was outside the realms of most people's experiences".

"I don't think I've ever cried so much in my whole life. And then, you just feel dead inside, it's really bizarre"

LONELINESS

If you didn't tell anyone about your pregnancy, you might feel alone in your pain and sadness. Although it can be challenging to be vulnerable and share these feelings, talking to someone about your loss may help with these feelings.

Partners, family, and friends may understand your feelings, or they may not. Partners often have different experiences and reactions, and open conversations can be worthwhile. If you do not receive the support you would like from friends or family, consider speaking to a support group or perhaps even a psychologist or mental health professional.

NUMBNESS/EMPTINESS

You may experience a period after the miscarriage where you feel emotionally and physically empty or numb. You may have noticed changes in your body due to the pregnancy. Some women feel a sense of disbelief that this has happened to them, and it may feel surreal to feel so distressed when there are limited memories to process. Allow yourself time to absorb what has happened, talk to others, and find ways to remember your baby.

NOTE: If you experience intense and prolonged feelings of disconnection, numbness, or dissociation which interfere with your functioning, you should speak with a mental health professional.

ANGER

Feelings of anger may arise because you do not feel in control of the situation or your body. Anger may arise from not knowing the reasons for the miscarriage or feeling dissatisfied with the medical treatment you received. Or you may be resentful that other people have not responded to you in the way you felt you needed. A miscarriage can feel unfair and unjust. Anger can sometimes be a way of keeping feelings of sadness at bay.

JEALOUSY

Many women describe feeling jealous of people who have children or have fallen pregnant. It is painful to see others with a baby, and, understandably, you feel this way. Criticising yourself and feeling ashamed about these feelings doesn't help and certainly doesn't take them away. These feelings are transient and don't make you a terrible person. Speaking with others who have experienced a miscarriage may be helpful. It can also be beneficial to avoid events that might trigger your sadness until you feel ready.

I absolutely hated it. Particularly the ones with an older child who were pregnant. I dunno why, it just made me feel sick seeing them to be honest. Yeah, I mean I, and then I hated myself for feeling like that.

CONFUSED

A miscarriage can be a very confusing experience. It can occur suddenly and out of the blue. There may be little explanation for why it happened, and you may experience a whole range of intense, complicated emotions as a result.

“I was sort of really soul searching and just trying to work out where the silver lining was because I just didn't quite get... why that would happen?”

SHOCK

You may experience shock as a miscarriage is not the outcome that you imagined when you found out you were pregnant. Shock and disbelief are common feelings, and it often takes time to absorb that you have had a miscarriage.

RELIEF

You may feel relieved after a miscarriage. Perhaps your baby was diagnosed with a medical condition, or you were unwell during pregnancy (e.g., Morning sickness or hyperemesis gravidarum). You may also feel relieved if the pregnancy was unplanned or if your circumstances would have made caring for a baby a challenge. There are many valid reasons people may feel relief following a miscarriage and feeling this way doesn't make you a bad person. You can feel relief simultaneously as feeling a range of other complicated emotions about the pregnancy loss.

FEAR/ANXIETY/WORRY

Worry or anxiety is a common emotion following a miscarriage. The intensity and duration of anxiety are likely to change over time.

The experience of the miscarriage itself may be very frightening, depending upon the circumstances. Necessary medical procedures may be painful, and you may not feel like you can control the situation. The absence of control can make you feel anxious.

Uneasy thoughts tend to take the form of "what if..." or "I should...". Many women fear having another miscarriage and worry about what this means about their body and their health. You may also feel nervous about telling others about the miscarriage. If you feel unable to switch off feelings of anxiety or worry, and you or others around you are concerned about you, consider seeking a referral to a psychologist or mental health professional who can assist you.

...yeah you kind of tend to blame yourself, and try to find answers as to why...it was very isolating, and I felt a lot of self-blame. I assumed it must be something that's wrong with me.

FAILURE OR LACK OF CONTROL

You may feel like you have failed yourself, your partner, or your family by miscarrying. Or perhaps you feel like your body has failed you or have no control over your body, which can arouse anger and anxiety. It is essential to know that it is highly unlikely that you have done anything to cause your miscarriage. Trusting your body again can take time.

GUILT

It is a shared experience for women to feel guilty or blame themselves for a miscarriage, fearing they did something "wrong." It is rarely the case that a woman's actions caused a miscarriage.

In distressing situations, where we have no control over outcomes, we are inclined to look for explanations about why terrible, unforeseen things happen. In the absence of proof, it is understandable why we might want to blame ourselves, even though there may be no evidence that you? caused this or were at fault in any way. You may also feel guilty because you feel relieved after losing a pregnancy. This feeling might coincide as you are feeling sad or anxious. It is normal to have a range of complex emotions at any one time. There is probably a good reason why part of you feels relieved, which is OK. Relief doesn't discount feelings of sadness or make you a terrible person. Uncertainty (or ambivalence) about the pregnancy is a normal part of all pregnancies, even the most wanted pregnancy.

"I just didn't trust my body not to kill another one of my children"

When pregnancies progress to term, people have generally had more time (and therefore a more significant opportunity) to work through and somewhat resolve feelings of ambivalence by the time the baby arrives. They probably still feel very anxious about what is ahead, but the dramatic physical changes of pregnancy, especially the latter stages, can support this adjustment. The often-sudden nature of miscarriage can interrupt this process, and people feel uneasiness when left with mixed (unresolved) feelings about the pregnancy.

WHEN SHOULD I SEEK MENTAL HEALTH CARE?

Like many others, you may be interested in knowing when normal worry, sadness, and stress following a miscarriage might become a mental health concern, such as a mood disorder, depression, or anxiety disorder. If you have previously experienced mental health difficulties, you may be vulnerable to a return of these symptoms. However, this is not necessarily the case. Conversely, you may have never experienced mental health difficulties before but now feel unable to move on from the miscarriage.



...at the time I really should have been referred to like a psychologist. Because I was really left to my own devices, and devices of family...they were sort of at a loss of what to do with me, when really, I should have sought out some grief counselling or something.

If you have concerns about your mental health, it is advisable to seek the assistance of a trained mental health professional, such as a psychologist, your GP, or other support services. This can be especially important if:

- You don't have someone to talk to
- Someone who cares about you is concerned about the changes in you
- Your ability to work, care for other children, or study is compromised
- You still feel intense grief over the loss several months after the miscarriage
- You are using alcohol or other drugs to cope

Pregnancy support counselling is available through referral from your GP for anyone who is pregnant or has been pregnant in the last 12 months (for each pregnancy). You are entitled to up to 3 x 30-minute sessions either with an eligible doctor, psychologist, social worker, or mental health nurse through Medicare. If you require ongoing mental health support, your doctor may assess your eligibility for a mental health care plan. This plan entitles you to up to 20 Medicare subsidised counselling sessions per annum.

ANXIETY

High levels of anxiety can feel hard to switch off, and it can cause significant distress and interfere with a person's quality of life. Anxiety has three key components:



MENTAL HEALTH SYMPTOMS

People who experience high anxiety tend to feel plagued by their thoughts. Signs may include difficulty switching off thoughts/worries about bad events happening (catastrophising, “what if...?”), rumination over past events, and obsessive thoughts. You may feel disproportionately responsible for things and attempt to manage or control events and outcomes.

PHYSICAL SYMPTOMS

These symptoms are associated with high levels of bodily arousal. They can include (but are not limited to) shortness of breath or shallow, rapid breathing, hot and cold flushes, racing heart, tightening in the chest or throat, panic attacks, restlessness, feeling agitated, wound up, or irritable. Difficulties falling asleep, staying asleep, or waking too early may also occur.

BEHAVIOURAL SYMPTOMS

To reduce feeling anxious, you might attempt to avoid situations that trigger anxiety (such as social gatherings and contacting friends). Criticising yourself and feeling ashamed about doing this won't take away your feelings of anxiety. It can help your recovery by avoiding events that might trigger your sadness until you feel ready in the short term.



DEPRESSION

Depression is different from sadness. Here's how:

When someone is depressed, they report feeling worthless, and they tend to struggle with self-loathing. They feel unable to experience pleasure, report feeling “stuck” in a persistently low mood, as well as isolated from themselves and others. They may also have generalised feelings of guilt and may reduce their functioning. They may also have thoughts of suicide.

Symptoms of depression may be similar to symptoms of anxiety, with the addition of some of the following symptoms:

- Mood swings
- Lack of energy
- Slowed thinking
- Feelings of sadness, emptiness, or numbness

POST-TRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER

It is normal to feel highly distressed after a frightening event such as a miscarriage. Recovery from traumatic events can take time, but we know that many people do recover with the support of family, friends, and other meaningful social connections (including support groups). These feelings of intense (peak) distress should gradually settle in the following days and weeks after a miscarriage, although it is likely that you will continue to grieve and feel very sad.

Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) can occur following traumatic events where a person or someone close to them was at risk of serious harm or death. Common symptoms of PTSD are:

- Re-experiencing the event (including nightmares or flashbacks)
- Avoidance (avoidance of things or places associated with the event)
- Hyperarousal – or the opposite numbing / dissociation
- Changes in mood and cognition (guilt, shame, irritability)

WHERE CAN I FIND MORE INFORMATION?

Visit our website by scanning the QR code below or visit 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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Miscarriage Australia strives to provide current and evidence-based information to everyone. In developing the website, we engaged an expert advisory committee to review the information to ensure our resources are evidence based and reflect current best-practice. The information provided in this factsheet is designed to support, not replace, the relationship that exists between a patient/user and their existing health care professional(s).

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