

# Caring for Yourself

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**After Pregnancy Loss**



# **Losing a pregnancy or experiencing the death of an infant may be one of the hardest things you will ever face.**

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**You are not alone. Miscarriages and stillbirths are far more common than many people realize.** Know that grieving is normal and impacts you both emotionally and physically. Included in this pamphlet is information to help you start your physical and emotional recovery.



# Taking Care of Yourself

You are going through a very challenging time in your life, so it may be hard to think about yourself. We have a few ideas for you to try that may help you feel better.

## Say yes

Accept help from friends and family who offer their support. Do not be afraid to ask for help. The people who care about you want to do what they can to make your life easier. Be specific. Let them know what help you need around the house or what errands they can run for you.



## Rest

Sleep patterns are often disrupted when you are grieving and recovering. You may need to rest more often.

## **Eat**

People often do not have much appetite when they are grieving. But it is important to eat foods high in vitamins and minerals. If eating seems to be too much, try small snacks, smoothies or protein shakes.



## **Be active**

When your doctor has cleared you for physical activity add some activities you enjoy and move each day.

## **Get help**

Seek grief counseling or therapy from a licensed professional. Check [Support Resources](#)



# Nutrition

Pregnancy changes your body in unexpected ways. Eating a diet with a variety of colors, textures, and foods may help you feel better, ease stress, anxiety, and depression. Eat often and include more foods like fruits, vegetables, fish, lower fat dairy, whole grains, beans, and legumes.

## **WIC provides nutritious foods for up to 6 months following your loss.**

- Protein to repair tissues in your body.
- Iron to keep your blood healthy and oxygen-rich.
- Vitamins and minerals from fruits and vegetables to aid in healing.
- Calcium to keep your bones and teeth healthy and strong.



## Recommended Daily Servings:



**3**  
A  
DAY

### Vegetables:

3 cups of vegetables a day  
1 cup = 1 cup raw or cooked



**2**  
A  
DAY

### Fruits:

2 cups of fruit a day  
1 cup = 1 cup fresh, canned,  
or frozen



**6**  
A  
DAY

### Protein:

6 servings of protein a day  
1 serving = 1 ounce



**6**  
A  
DAY

### Grains:

6 servings of grains a day  
1 serving = 1 ounce



**3**  
A  
DAY

### Dairy:

3 servings of dairy a day  
1 serving = 1 cup

# Breastmilk

Not every person who loses a pregnancy or a baby will have breastmilk. The further along you are at the time of your loss, the more likely it is you will have some breastmilk. This can be a difficult reminder of your loss. Some people choose to pump and donate their milk to a milk bank. Many others take steps to decrease and stop milk production.



## To donate your milk:

Some people find that pumping and donating their milk can be a part of the healing process. Milk banks are a good option. Donated milk will be given to babies who are in the neonatal intensive care unit, or babies who are otherwise sick. Milk banks follow strict criteria, and donors do screening questionnaires and mild medical testing. Many milk banks do not require a minimum donation amount in the case of pregnancy loss.

### **Mother's Milk Bank**

(877) 375-6645 or [www.mothersmilk.org](http://www.mothersmilk.org)

### **San Diego Milk Bank**

<https://health.universityofcalifornia.edu/patient-care/milk-bank>

## To help your breasts feel more comfortable:



- You may need to express just enough breastmilk to soften the breast. A warm shower will help relieve the discomfort of full breasts and is a good place to express a little milk.
- Apply wrapped cold packs (gel packs or a bag of frozen peas) directly on your breasts. Cold packs need to be changed frequently.

## To decrease milk production:

- How often you express should be determined by your comfort level. Go as long as you can before hand expressing or pumping. Pump just long enough to increase comfort, removing as little milk as possible. If you have been pumping every 3 hours, start out by pumping every 4 hours, then 6, then 8 and so on. By gradually expressing less milk less often, your supply will decrease without causing you physical discomfort.



- Avoid home or herbal remedies for decreasing breastmilk supply. These remedies may not be effective and can have serious side effects. Talk with your health care provider about medications that you can safely use to help decrease milk supply and lessen the pain and discomfort.



- Drink when you are thirsty. Cutting down on fluids will not reduce your milk supply.
- Do not tightly wrap (bind) your breasts. Wear a snug and supportive bra. Binding or tightly wrapping the breasts increases the chance of getting plugged ducts or infection and is not recommended.

# Physical Activity

Once your health care provider says that it is okay to begin physical activity, start slow. Mild physical activity can be an important part of your physical and emotional health. To start, try going on a short walk (5-10 minutes) with someone else. If this feels like too much, that is okay! Try walking in place while watching TV or around your home while you are on the phone. As you feel comfortable, increase the length or difficulty of your walk.

## Set small goals for yourself.



Walk in place while watching TV or talking on the phone.



Go for a short walk 5-10 minutes with a partner, friend or a loved one.



When ready, take a longer walk.



# Emotional Health

Losing a pregnancy or a baby is very hard. The hormonal changes that a body goes through with pregnancy and its end can impact one's emotions and make it harder to deal with grief. Grief is a natural human response to major changes or loss and can look and feel very different for different people.

Grief can be overwhelming and shift and change from day to day. The feelings described on the next pages may come and go in no specific order. They are some of the many ways people feel their grief. Some people may also experience a sense of relief after a loss. This is normal. If you are experiencing any of these feelings, consider reaching out to someone you trust and can talk to about them.





## **Denial**

At first, many people find it hard to believe that the loss occurred. They may not believe it or feel numb.

## **Anger**

It is common for people to feel that the loss is unfair. They may be angry at themselves or those around them for not preventing the loss.

## **Guilt**

Many people blame themselves for the loss, as if there was something they could have done differently to prevent it. This is a common feeling.

## **Depression**

Grieving the loss may make a person feel tired and have no energy to perform daily tasks.

## **Loneliness**

A person's grief may make them feel lonely or isolated from others.

## Acceptance

Everyone grieves in their own way and expresses their grief differently. As time passes, a person will find that they spend less of their day thinking about the loss and start to have more hope for the future. It is still part of the person, but they will adjust to their new normal.

## Frustration

Losing a baby can make a person feel frustrated for many reasons: a person may have had difficulty becoming pregnant, undergone many tests and treatments, or may feel like they have no control over their body.

## Fear or Panic

A miscarriage, stillbirth, or death of an infant is a sudden and unplanned change in a person's life. This change can leave the person feeling unable to control other aspects of their life. They may feel they have lost their sense of security and worry about the safety of their friends and family. They may be worried to leave the safety of their home.

You may already have strong social support from friends and family, but they might not fully understand what you are going through. A support group is a good resource to aid in the healing process. Interacting with people who have experienced similar losses can help you as you recover.



## When to seek professional help

Grief can be very difficult, and no two people grieve the same way. Grief is a natural process, but sometimes support is needed. Think about the answers to these questions as you consider whether or not to seek help.



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**YES** Do you experience an ongoing sense of numbness, or of feeling isolated from others?

**NO**

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**YES** Do you usually feel that you have no one to talk to about what has happened?

**NO**

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**YES** Are you highly anxious most of the time about your own death or the death of someone you love?

**NO**

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**YES** Is your grief beginning to interfere with your relationships, your ability to concentrate, or live as you would like to live?

**NO**

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**YES** Do you find yourself acting in ways that might prove harmful to you over time:

**NO**

- drinking more than you used to,
  - using more prescription or non-prescription drugs,
  - driving in an unsafe or reckless manner, or
  - having thoughts about suicide?
- .....

**YES**

Is there some aspect of what you are experiencing that makes you wonder about whether you are normal?

**NO**

**YES**

Are you always irritable, annoyed, intolerant or angry these days?

**NO**

If you answered yes to one or more of these questions, you may benefit from seeking professional support. This support can come from many sources: your physician, a trusted religious leader, a social worker, a grief counselor, or a therapist. Even if you answered no to all of these questions, processing grief with a professional can be an important tool in your recovery.

Talk to your WIC Counselor about local support resources near you. Often there are resources available at no or low cost.

# Support Resources

**MISS Foundation:**

[www.missfoundation.org](http://www.missfoundation.org)

**HAND (Helping After Neonatal Death):**

[www.handonline.org](http://www.handonline.org)

**March of Dimes:**

[www.marchofdimes.org/complications/loss-and-grief.aspx](http://www.marchofdimes.org/complications/loss-and-grief.aspx)

**Postpartum Support International:**

[www.postpartum.net](http://www.postpartum.net) Find counseling resources near you.

Call: 1-800-944-4773, Text "Help" to 800-944-4773

**National Maternal Mental Health Hotline:**

[National Maternal Mental Health Hotline | MCHB \(hrsa.gov\)](https://www.hrsa.gov/national-maternal-mental-health-hotline)

1-833-943-5746 (1-833-9-HELP4MOMS)

**California Department of Public Health,  
California WIC Program**

*This institution is an equal  
opportunity provider.*

**1-888-942-9675 | [MyFamily.WIC.ca.gov](http://MyFamily.WIC.ca.gov)**

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