



MISCARRIAGE
ASSOCIATION

The knowledge to help

Pregnancy loss and infertility



Losing a baby after fertility problems, or having trouble getting pregnant again after a miscarriage or an ectopic pregnancy, can feel impossible to cope with.

Pregnancy loss¹ and infertility can both be devastating. But when you² are going through both at the same time, it can leave you feeling desperate.

It's important to know that you are not alone and that there is support available.

This leaflet is for everyone who has experienced infertility and miscarriage or ectopic pregnancy. We hope you will find something here which will help you.

It's often hard to find out why a pregnancy has been lost. Your doctor probably couldn't tell you why it happened to you and this can make it harder to cope. We list some of the main causes of miscarriage and ectopic pregnancy here.

Miscarriage

Miscarriage is sadly common. About one in every four pregnancies ends this way. The main causes are:

Genetic

This is when the baby doesn't develop normally from the start and can't survive. This happens more often in older women (especially after the age of 39) and it is the cause of more than half of all early miscarriages.

“After the miscarriage, everyone told me to try again as soon as I could. It had been so easy the first time round that I never expected to find I couldn't get pregnant again.”

Hormonal

Hormonal imbalances can cause miscarriage, especially in women with a condition called Polycystic Ovary Syndrome (PCOS).

Blood-clotting problems

Problems in the vessels that supply the placenta with blood can lead to miscarriage.

¹ *Pregnancy loss means miscarriage, ectopic pregnancy or molar pregnancy. To make this leaflet easier to read, we often use the word 'miscarriage' to cover all types of pregnancy loss.*

² *We have written this leaflet as if we are talking to the woman who has miscarried. We hope it will also be helpful for her partner, family or friends.*

Infection

Minor infections like coughs and colds are harmless. But very high fevers and some illnesses may cause miscarriage.

Anatomical

- If your cervix (the bottom of the uterus) is weak, it may start to open too early and cause a miscarriage;
- If your uterus has an irregular shape there may not be enough room for the baby to grow;
- Large fibroids (harmless growths in the uterus) can lead to miscarriage in later pregnancy.

For more information it may be helpful to read our leaflet *Why me?*

Ectopic Pregnancy

An ectopic pregnancy happens when the embryo starts growing in the wrong place (the word “ectopic” means “out of place”). Around 1 in 100 pregnancies in the UK is ectopic and it can happen whether you conceive naturally or after fertility treatment.

Most ectopic pregnancies develop in one of the fallopian tubes that join the womb to the ovary. If the pregnancy continues to grow, it can stretch the tube until it bursts and this can be dangerous.

It's often not clear why an ectopic pregnancy happens but the two main causes are:

Damage to the tube

Some operations or conditions like appendicitis or pelvic infection can damage the tube by causing scarring. That can narrow or block the tube, making it difficult for the fertilised egg to pass through.

Other problem with the tube

There could also be a problem with the walls of the tube, where tiny hairs would normally “waft” the fertilised egg into the womb.

Any delay in the egg's progress means that it might still be in the tube when it is ready to implant.

For more information it may be helpful to read our leaflet *Ectopic pregnancy*.

“Once the IVF had worked, the last thing I expected was to miscarry...”

Miscarriage after fertility treatment

If you've had fertility treatment, there is a higher chance that you might have a miscarriage. That's not because of the treatment itself but because:

- Women who've had fertility treatment are often older – and that increases the chance of miscarriage
- Some fertility problems can also increase the risk of miscarriage
- Women who have fertility treatment often know they are pregnant very early on, so they will be more aware than most if they have had an early miscarriage

Your feelings

The combination of miscarriage and infertility can be very difficult to bear. Everyone reacts differently and there is no right or wrong way to feel or to deal with what has happened.

You might feel lonely, angry, guilty, helpless – or very down and depressed. You may be asking why this had to happen to you. And you may wonder whether things will ever get better.

“I can't help feeling a failure, let down by my body.”

You may be wondering whether what's happened is somehow your fault, or your partner's. It's **very** unlikely that anything you did or didn't do caused either your miscarriage or your problems getting pregnant. Sadly, this can happen even if you do all the right things.

You might feel angry about what happened. And you may find yourself getting angry at people around you who don't seem to have a problem getting pregnant and having babies. It's only natural to feel jealous and you may resent them.

It may be that this was your last attempt to have a child. Perhaps it took you a long time to get pregnant, or you have already had several miscarriages. Maybe there are other reasons why you feel you can't try again.

“I just kept thinking, 'Why me?'. I know a miscarriage is an awful thing to happen to anyone, but it was all so much worse for us, because we'd waited so long for me to get pregnant in the first place and I didn't know if I'd ever be able to conceive again.”

Your partner

Partners often feel that they should be strong and supportive rather than showing their own feelings. That can be true for a female partner as well as a man.

Infertility and miscarriage can make things difficult in your relationship, and going through them both at the same time can be very hard to cope with. You might deal with things differently, and you may feel guilty or as if you have let one another down.

It can be difficult if one of you wants to talk about what has happened and the other doesn't. If it's too hard to talk to one another about how you are feeling, you may want to get some help (see page 7).

You might find it helpful to read our leaflet *Partners Too*.

If you don't have a partner, this may be a very difficult and lonely time. It's important to find support from someone who understands so you don't have to deal with this alone.

Family and friends

Family, friends and colleagues may not know what to say or how to help.

They may not talk about what has happened at all. Sometimes they think this is for the best as they are trying not to remind you about it.

They might say things that are meant to cheer you up, but are actually upsetting – for example “at least you know you can get pregnant”.

Sadly, some people may never really understand how difficult this is for you.

“I'm so sad to think that this could be the closest we get to having a family, that tiny baby on the screen could be the nearest thing to a child we ever have.

I'm not sure I can go through another IVF cycle. It is really hard both emotionally and physically and I couldn't bear this to happen again. Maybe we just have to accept this is the end of our dreams of a family.”

Hospitals and fertility clinics

Even when you have good medical care, you might feel that you've been left on your own, with no support.

If you've been to a fertility clinic, they will have a specialist counsellor. He or she should be able to understand what you are going through and provide help.

If you haven't been through a clinic, your GP may be able to refer you to a counsellor. Or you can find a private counsellor who knows about infertility through BICA (see page 7).

But if you don't feel you are getting the support you need, or if you're looking for support rather than counselling, contact the Miscarriage Association or Fertility Network UK.

It can make a difference if you have people around you who can understand what you are going through and can offer support and a listening ear. We can help to put you in touch with other people who have been through similar experiences and can help you feel less alone. See page 7 for contact details.

Moving forward, moving on

One of the hardest things about living with infertility and miscarriage is not knowing if you will ever be a parent. Even so, you may feel positive about continuing to try for a baby, whether or not you need treatment.

On the other hand, you may wonder how long you should keep trying, and whether you can cope with the possibility of more disappointment.

You might start thinking about other ways of being a parent, like adoption or fostering. You may consider supporting a child with particular needs, perhaps as a learning mentor or by volunteering with a children's charity.

You may decide that you will learn to live without children and move on to a different kind of future.

It's important to know that your feelings are likely to change over time and you might make and 'un-make' these decisions several times.

You might find it helpful to read our leaflet *When the trying stops*.

“Once I was able to talk to people who really understood, I managed to come to terms with my feelings and work through my grief.”

Pregnancy loss and infertility: a summary

- Living with infertility and pregnancy loss is difficult and very upsetting
- You may find it hard to cope with other people's pregnancies and babies
- You might wonder whether you will ever have a baby or whether you want to keep trying
- You may find it helps to talk to other people who can understand and support you.

Where to go for help and support

The Miscarriage Association has a telephone helpline, a volunteer support service, an online support forum and a range of leaflets about miscarriage, ectopic and molar pregnancy.

Tel: 01924 200799;
www.miscarriageassociation.org.uk
17 Wentworth Terrace, Wakefield
WF1 3QW

Fertility Network UK

offers information, support and advice to anyone affected by fertility problems.

Tel: 01424 732361;
www.fertilitynetworkuk.com
Charter House, 43 St Leonards Road,
Bexhill on Sea, TN40 1JA

BICA (British Infertility Counselling Association)

maintains a register of counsellors who specialise in fertility issues.
www.bica.net

The British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy

maintains a register of qualified counsellors and therapists.

Tel: 01455 883300
www.itsgoodtotalk.org.uk
BACP House, 15 St John's Business
Park, Lutterworth LE17 4HB

Relate

can help with relationship problems.

Tel: 0300 100 1234;
www.relate.org.uk

The Samaritans

can help people in serious emotional distress, 24 hours a day.

Tel: 116123 (Freephone);
www.samaritans.org.uk

Thanks

Our sincere thanks to Fertility Network UK and especially to Kate Brian, for their support in writing this leaflet.

Need to talk to someone who understands?

Call our support line on 01924 200799. Monday to Friday, 9am-4pm

Or email info@miscarriageassociation.org.uk



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The Miscarriage Association
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