

Pregnancy Loss and Body Grief

Years ago a woman was not supposed to grieve after a pregnancy loss.

If you have a pregnancy loss, you are entitled to whatever feelings you have, whether they are mild or intense, mixed or very clear. Some women feel like they're in shock, or depressed and guilty. They may feel that way for many weeks or months. If you are told that you're "overreacting" or "exaggerating your feelings," know that this is not true.

On the other hand, some women feel sad for a few days at the most and that's all. Don't feel bad if you don't feel bad, and you don't have to believe those who say you are "repressing" or "denying your feelings." Your feelings will vary depending on many factors, including whether this was a planned pregnancy.

Another factor in pregnancy grief is how far advanced the pregnancy was. Were you six weeks pregnant, or did you go through labor and give birth to a perfectly formed baby who was dead? Often, but not always, the intensity of feeling increases the more real the baby seems.

Be aware that your body "grieves," too. It suddenly has to adjust hormonal levels and make other bodily changes. The further along you are, the more adjustments your body has to make. This "body grief" affects a woman who gives up a baby for adoption or has an abortion, too. Breasts leak and other body changes occur.

If you have a miscarriage, ectopic pregnancy, stillbirth or newborn death, ask your health care provider to explain to you as much as possible what happened. Ask what may have caused the loss and also clarify what didn't cause it--that glass of wine you had six months ago, or the chocolate bars you ate last week. The more you know of the details, the more likely it is that you will resolve your grief and move on.

It's normal to want to talk about a pregnancy, whether it ended happily or unhappily. Talking about it helps put it into perspective. If you want to talk to other women who also have had a pregnancy loss, contact one of the "Miscarriage" organizations in the Resource Directory at the back of the book. These organizations can also give you information on what other parents do when babies die, including holding the baby, taking pictures, and funeral arrangements.

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