



Caring for Yourself after a Loss

We are sorry for your loss and we recognize that this will be an extremely difficult time for you and your family. There are many changes happening in your body after the loss of your baby. The following information may be helpful for you.

Afterpains

Your uterus is where your baby was growing inside of you. As your uterus shrinks, you might feel cramps like your period, called “afterpains.” Afterpains can come and go for several days, up to a week. To help with afterpains, keep your bladder empty and place a warm blanket or heating pad on your abdomen. It also may help to take a warm shower. You can use pain medicine such as acetaminophen (Tylenol) or ibuprofen (Advil, Motrin) as needed according to the package. Your uterus shrinks back into your pelvic area by about 6 to 8 weeks.

Bleeding from your Vagina

For the first 2 to 3 days you will have flow of dark red blood from your vagina. This flow may be heavier than your normal period flow. You may have a gush of blood when you stand up from sitting or lying down. You may pass blood clots that vary in size from a pea to a loonie. After 2 to 3 days the flow may be pinkish brown, and then it will change again to yellow or white. The light flow or spotting from your vagina may last up to 6 weeks. Your period may start again after 2 weeks or be delayed for up to 10 weeks.

Call your health care provider or Health Link Alberta at 811 if:

- your bleeding increases or you pass a clot larger than toonie size
- you have symptoms of infection (fever, temperature of 39 degrees Celsius or higher, chills) or if you have foul smelling vaginal discharge
- If you have severe pains or if you have heavy bleeding that soaks a maxi pad within an hour or less for two hours go to the nearest emergency room.

Do not put anything into your vagina while bleeding. Do not have sex, use tampons or douche during this time. If you have stitches, you may want to wait longer. Avoid hot tubs or swimming pools while you are still flowing. You may choose to take tub baths, ensure the water is clean and that you do not add any bath products. Try not to take long tub baths as this may increase your risk of infection.

Hygiene

Hormone levels change for 2 to 3 weeks. You may sweat more at night. Shower daily. Each time you use the toilet clean your vaginal area with warm water from a cup or peri bottle and change your pad. If you had a vaginal delivery you may have a bath as soon as you feel able to, unless your health care provider tell you otherwise.

Resuming Intimacy

Emotions may make you want to resume intimacy soon after you return home. When you decide to have sex, make sure the bleeding and spotting have stopped. Use a water based gel lubricant (KY or Muco) as needed for comfort. Discuss birth control with your doctor before you have sex. You can get pregnant even if you have not had your period. Your doctor will recommend how long you should wait before trying to get pregnant again. The reason for your loss may also affect future pregnancies. Trying to get pregnant again is a personal choice.

Bladder and Bowels

Your bladder may not completely empty at first. It is important that when you feel the urge, you go to the bathroom. It is common to pass more urine for about 2 to 5 days as your body may be getting rid of extra fluid that may have accumulated in your hands, arms, legs or feet.

Bowels may move slower for the first few days. Drink plenty of fluids and fruit juices. Eat raw fruits and vegetables as well as whole grains. Walking may help.

Call your health care provider or Health Link Alberta at 811 if:

- It is hard to have a bowel movement.
- It hurts or you feel burning when you pass urine.
- You have a frequent and urgent need to pass urine.
- Your urine looks cloudy or very dark or has a foul smell.

Hemorrhoids

Veins in and around your anus may be large and tender. They should shrink in about a week. If they throb feel hard, itch, bleed or hurt call your doctor's office.

- Lie down and rest when you can. This will take pressure off the hemorrhoids.
- Eat and drink to avoid constipation.
- Do not push or strain during bowel movements.
- Moisten a clean maxi pad and freeze it, then put the frozen maxi pad in your underwear to help reduce the swelling.
- Use medicine your doctor suggests (Use a hemorrhoid cream and/or Tucks towelettes).

Care for your Breasts

Within a few days, your breasts may start filling with milk. You may even notice drops of milk from your breasts. This might bring on deeper sadness or anger. You might feel this is not fair. These mixed feelings are normal and all of them are okay.

Your breasts may start to feel heavy and sore (tender). Some of these things have been found to be helpful:

- Wear a comfortable bra with good support 24 hours a day. Many women prefer a sports bra.
- If your breasts leak, you may want to try using breast pads.
- When you shower let your breasts leak to relieve the pressure.
- DO NOT use heat directly on your breasts as this could make you more uncomfortable.
- You may take acetaminophen (Tylenol) or ibuprofen (Advil, Motrin) as the package says
- Ice packs or wet, cold face cloths may be placed on the breasts for no more than 20 minutes at a time
- Cool cabbage leaves placed inside your bra for a few hours at a time can help the swelling go down. Store the cabbage in the fridge and wash and dry it before using it in your bra.
- Don't pump, unless you intend to donate your milk, as this may overstimulate your breasts and cause you to produce more milk
- Gently massage your breasts with oil, using the motion as if applying lotion all over them right back to your armpits, just until your breasts are comfortable again.
- Some mothers find it comforting to donate their breastmilk for Neonatal Intensive Care Units (NICU) for infants that require additional milk. Please refer to the resources at the end of this handout for contact information for Northern Star Mothers Milk Bank.

Call your health care provider or Health Link Alberta at 811, if:

- One or both of your breast are hard, red and painful
- You have chills or a fever

Delivery by Cesarean Section

You may have pain over your incision for up to 2 weeks that you may need to take pain medicine for. You will probably need 6 weeks to fully recover. Your grief may cause your pain to last past the usual time line. **If at any time you are concerned that you're not healing properly call your health care provider or Health Link Alberta at 811.**

It is important to take it easy while your incision is healing. Avoid strenuous activities or heavy lifting during your recovery (examples: biking, jogging, aerobics or sit-ups) until your healthcare provider clears you to do so.

Try to walk each day and slowly increase the amount you walk. Walking boosts blood flow to help healing and helps prevent blood clots.

Wash your incision daily with warm soapy water and pat it dry, then keep it clean and dry.

Slowly Become More Active

Rest or take short naps when you can. Sit with your feet raised for 20 to 30 minutes. The following activities are okay if they do not cause pain or more bleeding:

- Light housework and shopping.
- Climbing stairs and easy walking.

If pain or bleeding increase, decrease the amount of activity you are doing and get more rest.

Coping with Grief

Grief may affect people in different ways, all are acceptable. As you remember your baby, you may cry often and become easily upset. You may feel very tired. You might feel angry or confused as well. Your body will change because you are no longer pregnant. Even though these changes are normal, they may make you feel sad.

Grief is a normal response to the loss of someone we love, it is not always depression. Intense feelings are normal and can last for months. It is common to think “I can’t believe this happened.” You may cry and feel tired or worry and not know why. Give yourself time to feel sad, cry and talk about your feelings and what happened to you. Many mothers and fathers have feelings of an aching heart and empty arms. You might dream about your baby. You might feel confused or angry if no one knows why your baby died. Even if you know you may wonder, “Why us?” Be kind to yourself. Don’t expect too much of yourself and try to be with people that are caring. You may want to plan a funeral or memorial service. You also may not feel sad at all. All of these feelings are normal.

Each person is different. Most parents will experience all of these at one time or another:

- You have no interest in things that used to make you happy.
- You feel angry, “out of sorts,” or irritable.
- You are sad and down. You cannot shake your sadness.
- You have more bad days than good days.
- You cannot enjoy things you used to enjoy. You cannot focus on your work or enjoy friends.
- You cannot or do not want to parent other children or talk to your partner.
- You feel nervous a lot.
- The death of your baby is always on your mind.
- You relive the time when your baby died.
- You have intense feelings of fear or panic.
- Thoughts of your loss come when you do not want them.
- You have nightmares or cannot sleep.

If these feelings are persistent, get professional help. Talk to someone you trust. You are not alone, but your feelings may be different than the feelings of other members of your family or support system.

Everyone grieves differently. The following things may bring you comfort:

- Read about others who had a baby die.
- Take part in events that honour babies who have died
- Look at keepsakes of your baby.
- Plan a yearly anniversary or remembrance.
- Talk to other family members including other children about the loss of your baby.
- Seek support from your community and support system.
- See a counselor.
- See other resources in your folder for more information.

If you fail to feel better or feel worse, call your health care provider. **If you think about hurting yourself or someone else go to the nearest emergency room or call 911.**

People who are grieving have good and bad days. As time passes, you should have more good days than bad. You may want to find some way to honour your baby. You will start to feel good without guilt and you will start to believe you can get through this. You may laugh and feel hopeful; however sad feelings are still normal. Life will be forever changed, but you will find your new normal.

Central Zone Resources

Many parents have found comfort with their grief process by reading, using the internet, accessing community support or spending time in silent reflection. We hope these resources provide some assistance to you and your family.

- **H.E.A.R.T.S** (Helping Empty Arms Recover Through Sharing)
(Email: hearts@rdpcn.com Phone: 403.343.9100)
Peer support group designed to help grieving families after the loss of their previous baby during pregnancy or shortly after (not a counselling session).
- **Forget Me Not Pregnancy Loss Program** (Wetaskiwin) (Email: artofhealing17@gmail.com)
A support program for mothers who have experienced pregnancy loss
- **Call 211** – For Community and Social Services
You will speak to an Information and Referral Specialist, or you can chat online from 12pm - 8am (MT standard time) daily.
- **Enhanced Services for Women:** Red Deer Mental Health (Phone: 403.340.5466)
They offer individual counselling and referrals to connect you with appropriate community support.
- **Mental Health Help Line** (Phone:1.877.303.2642)
- Your local **Public Health** Nurse will have resource information for you

Location	Contact	Location	Contact
Camrose	780.679.2980	Red Deer	403.356.6300
Castor	403.882.3404	Rimbey	403.843.2288
Coronation	403.578.3200	Rocky Mtn House	403.845.3030
Consort	403.577.3770	Sedgewick	780.384.3652
Drayton Valley	780.542.4415	Stettler	403.742.3326
Drumheller	403.820.6004	Sundre	403.638.4063
Eckville	403.746.2001	Sylvan Lake	403.887.2241
Elnora	403.773.3636	Three Hills	403.443.5355
Hanna	403.854.5236	Tofield	780.662.3984
Innisfail	403.227.7820	Two Hills	780.657.3361
Kitscoty	780.846.2824	Vegreville	780.632.3331
Lacombe	403.782.3218	Vermilion	780.853.5270
Lamont	780.895.2211	Viking	780.336.4782
Olds	403.559-2150	Wainwright	780.842.4077
Ponoka	403.783.4491	Wetaskiwin	780.361.4333
Provost	780.753.6180		

First Nations

Location	Contact
Maskwacis Health Services	780.585.3830
Sunchild Health Services	403.989.3962
O'Chiese Health	403.989.3900
Big Horn/Small Boy	403.721.2262

- Websites
 - [MyHealthAlberta – Miscarriage](#) [MyHealthAlberta - Stillbirth](#) [MyHealthAlberta – Neonatal Death](#)
 - www.caringbeyond.ca
 - www.northernmilkbank.ca (milk donation)
 - www.grievingparents.net
- Note:** There are various support groups through social media as well