

Postpartum Loss

Coping, Healing, Hoping



**Department of
Health**

Women, Infants, and
Children Program (WIC)

“ Pregnancy and birth can take a lot out of you: mentally, physically and emotionally. It is important to take care of your heart, body and mind, especially if you lost your baby. ”

Take Care of Yourself

Say yes. Ask for and accept help from friends and family. The people who care about you want to do what they can to make your life easier. It may be little things like doing a load of laundry, loading the dishwasher, running errands, or cooking dinner.

Rest. Grief can make it harder to fall and stay asleep. Following a routine may help. Try to rest when you can.

Eat healthy foods: You may not feel very hungry, but eating healthy foods is important. If eating feels like too much, try small snacks or smoothies. It might help to set reminders to eat.

Be active. When you feel up to it and your health care provider agrees it's okay, add in some physical activity. Moving and getting fresh air might help you feel better.

Talk to someone. You may find it helpful to talk with a therapist or social worker. They may help in different ways than your family and friends.

Physical Activity

Being active may help you feel better because it releases endorphins in your body that can help you feel happier. Talk with your health care provider and when you're ready to begin, take it slow.

To start, try a short walk with a partner, friend or loved one. If walking is too much, try marching in place while watching a show or talking on the phone. Set small goals for yourself; when your short walk feels easy, try a longer walk or add in some hills.



Your Body Heals Best

Pregnancy takes a lot from your body, regardless of whether or not you were able to carry your baby to term. Eating regular meals helps you heal faster and have more energy.

WIC foods provide:

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

Try to eat from each of the food groups to get the different nutrients your body needs.

GRAINS - Choose whole grains at least 6 servings.

1 serving is equal to:

- 1 slice of bread or 6-inch tortilla.
- $\frac{1}{2}$ bagel or whole wheat bun.
- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup cooked cereal, rice, or noodles.
- 1 cup cold cereal.

At least half the grains you eat should be whole grains, like oatmeal, brown rice, corn or whole wheat tortillas, or bread. Whole grains can help reduce constipation and manage your weight.



VEGETABLES - Vary your veggies at least 2 $\frac{1}{2}$ servings.

1 serving is equal to:

- 1 cup raw vegetables canned, fresh, or frozen.
- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup cooked vegetables.
- 1 cup vegetable or tomato soup.
- 2 cups fresh salad greens.

Eat many different types and colors. Dark green or orange vegetables are rich in vitamin A. Enjoy them every day to keep your eyes and skin healthy and protect against infections.



When You Eat Well

FRUITS - Eat a variety at least 2 servings.

1 serving is equal to:

- 1 cup fresh, frozen, or canned fruit.
- 1 medium to large apple, orange, or peach.

Have a vitamin C fruit every day, like oranges, berries, or melons.

Vitamin C helps absorb more iron from other foods, providing you with more energy and strength.



PROTEIN - Go lean at least 5½ servings.

1 serving is equal to:

- ¼ cup meat, chicken, turkey, or fish.
- 1 egg.
- ¼ cup beans or tofu.
- 1 tablespoon peanut butter.
- 2 tablespoons nuts.

Meat, chicken, turkey, fish, and beans provide

iron and zinc to keep your blood strong. Beans and lentils are very low in fat.



DAIRY - Choose low fat options at least 3 servings.

1 serving is equal to:

- 8 ounces nonfat or 1% milk.
- 1 cup lowfat yogurt.
- 1-2 slices lowfat cheese.

Dairy foods offer calcium and potassium to build strong bones and teeth, and lower blood pressure.

If it is hard to drink milk, get ideas from WIC.



FATS, OILS, & SWEETS

Add a little healthy fat, like olive or canola oil, avocados, nuts, and seeds. While they may help keep your cholesterol low, they are high in calories — just 5 or 6 teaspoons a day is enough.



Lactation

If you had a stillbirth, late miscarriage, or placed your baby up for adoption, it is likely your milk will come in within a few days after delivery. You can choose to pump and donate your milk for any length of time you choose, or you can take steps to stop milk production.

To donate your milk:

Expressing your milk may allow you more time to grieve and help you begin to heal, knowing your donated milk is helping others.

If you're interested in donating your milk, call the Ohio Health Mother's Milk Bank at 614-566-0630 to begin the process or email MilkBank@OhioHealth.com.



To help with discomfort:

Your breasts may feel uncomfortable and full while you are decreasing milk production. These tips may help give you some relief.

- Wear a supportive bra with a nursing pad to absorb leaking milk.
- Express just enough milk to soften them, but do not empty completely.
- Take warm showers for comfort and to help milk flow.
- Use a cold compress for 20 minutes.
- Place cold, green cabbage leaves on your breast.

Note:

- Avoid using medications to “dry up” milk. They may cause serious side effects.
- Do not bind your breasts. This may cause plugged ducts or mastitis.



Emotional Health

Pregnancy and childbirth can be very emotional times. Even more so if it was difficult to become pregnant, it involved many tests and treatments, or you experienced a miscarriage, stillbirth or placed your baby up for adoption.

You will likely experience many different emotions and these might last for months or years. Everyone is different and there is no right or wrong way to grieve a lost pregnancy. Know that your feelings are normal. It's common to feel fine one day and terrible the next.



Working through grief.

Grief is a process and may include:

Denial. Often, denying your loss or feeling numb is the first reaction to a great loss.

Anger. It is common to feel that your loss is unfair, and this may make you angry at yourself or those around you for not preventing the loss. You may feel like you have no control over your body.

Depression. Grieving your loss may make you feel tired, as if you do not have energy to perform daily tasks.

Loneliness. Your grief may make you feel lonely or isolated from others.

Guilt. You may wonder if there was something you could have done differently. Knowing there was nothing you could have done to change the outcome may not take away the feeling that you should or could have done more.

Fear or Panic. A miscarriage or stillbirth is a sudden and unplanned change in your life and can leave you feeling out of control. You may feel as though you've lost your sense of security and worry about the safety of your friends and family.

Acceptance. As time passes, you will reach a point when you can accept your loss and have hope for the future. Allow yourself to experience grief in your own way and at your own pace.

“No matter how tiny the footprint, the life of a child leaves an imprint on a family’s heart.”



Coping as a couple.

Parents grieve differently; understand this is normal and doesn't mean that one parent is experiencing more or less grief.

Some parents may shift into problem-solving mode when faced with a crisis. They may end up feeling helpless, or angry when they aren't able to "fix" the other partner's grief. Miscommunication is also a common problem. You may cry when your partner talks about the baby so they may learn to not bring up the subject. And because they don't bring it up, then you might feel as though they don't care, when they really do.

To help with this, share your feelings and show each other how much you care. Be patient and treat each other gently.

Trying again.

Some people may feel they want to try for another baby as soon as possible, and that is okay, yet getting pregnant again won't take away your grief. Talk to your doctor about the best time to begin trying. Do what feels right for you and your partner. It may be a good idea to give yourself time to grieve first.

If you get pregnant again, it's normal to feel anxious. It's a good idea to talk to your health care provider, especially if you feel like your fears and worries are taking over.

Seeking Help

Support Groups. Joining a support group may help. Even with the best intentions, family and friends might not fully understand what you are going through and may still make insensitive comments. Sharing experiences with other parents who have been through the same thing can help you move forward.

Professional Help. You might benefit from a referral to a mental health counselor or therapist.

Think about the answers to these questions as you consider whether or not to seek help.

- Do you still feel numb, or detached from others? Do you feel that you have no one to talk to about what's happened?
- Are you highly anxious most of the time about your own death or death of someone you love?
- Do you find yourself acting in harmful ways like drinking more or using more prescription or non-prescription drugs; driving recklessly; or having thoughts about suicide?
- Is there some aspect of what you're experiencing that makes you wonder about whether you're normal?
- Are you always irritable, annoyed, intolerant or angry?
- Is any of this beginning to interfere with your relationships, your ability to concentrate, or live as you would like to live?

If you answered yes to one or more of these questions, you may benefit from professional support.

- Call your health care provider.
- Call the free and confidential support hotline for pregnant and new moms at 1-833-TLC-MAMA (1-833-852-6262).
- Learn more about postpartum depression (PPD) symptoms, resources, and support here: www.womenshealth.gov/TalkingPPD.
- Call the Ohio Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (OhioMHAS) at 1-877-275-6364 or check the website: www.mha.ohio.gov.
- Check out Perinatal Outreach and Encouragement for Moms (POEM) website. <https://mhaohio.org/get-help/maternal-mental-health/>

Your Rights

In accordance with federal civil rights law and U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) civil rights regulations and policies, this institution is prohibited from discriminating on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex (including gender identity and sexual orientation), disability, age, or reprisal or retaliation for prior civil rights activity.

Program information may be made available in languages other than English. Persons with disabilities who require alternative means of communication to obtain program information (e.g., Braille, large print, audiotape, American Sign Language), should contact the responsible state or local agency that administers the program or USDA's TARGET Center at (202) 720-2600 (voice and TTY) or contact USDA through the Federal Relay Service at (800) 877-8339.

To file a program discrimination complaint, a Complainant should complete a Form AD-3027, USDA Program Discrimination Complaint Form which can be obtained online at: <https://www.usda.gov/sites/default/files/documents/USDA-OASCR%20P-Complaint-Form-0508-0002-508-11-28-17Fax2Mail.pdf>, from any USDA office, by calling (866) 632-9992, or by writing a letter addressed to USDA. The letter must contain the complainant's name, address, telephone number, and a written description of the alleged discriminatory action in sufficient detail to inform the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights (ASCR) about the nature and date of an alleged civil rights violation. The completed AD-3027 form or letter must be submitted to USDA by:

- 1. Mail:** U.S. Department of Agriculture
Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights
1400 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, D.C. 20250-9410; or
- 2. Fax:** (833) 256-1665 or (202) 690-7442; or
- 3. Email:** program.intake@usda.gov

This institution is an equal opportunity provider.

11/2024

Adapted from Michigan WIC.



HEA 8333