

'Picking up the Pieces after a Miscarriage'

Personal and Professional Insights to Promote Healing and Hope

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Nothing is more exciting than a planned pregnancy. Bonding with the new life growing inside you can happen immediately. Nicole remembers instantly feeling connected to her unborn baby. Tania was excited about their second child and all the hopes and dreams associated with the baby's growth and arrival. However, when that life is unexpectedly stolen from us, it is devastating. You are left feeling both emotionally and physically empty, with little direction of how to pick up the pieces and move on.

After having both experienced losses during pregnancy, we were disappointed by the lack of information and support for women and their partners. We hope to normalize and validate your experience and empower you to make informed decisions about how best to heal. Tania felt it difficult to find information on the physical part of loss, how long the process would take, the physical discomfort, the extended blood loss, the invasive (but necessary) procedures and repeat blood work plus ultrasounds to ensure everything had passed. It left her feeling drained both physically and emotionally after weeks of being poked and prodded.

It is Normal to feel any and all of the following grief reactions: shock, disbelief, guilt ("I must have done something to cause this."), anger, sadness, emptiness, a sense of being betrayed by our bodies, shame ("There must be something wrong with me.") and fear ("Will I ever get pregnant?" "What if this happens again?"). In addition, miscarriages can be physically painful and require invasive procedures, leaving us in emotional and physical pain.

What You Need to Know:

1) It is not your fault and you are not alone. 1/3 of pregnancies end in miscarriages. Many women lose a baby before they even realize they are pregnant. The sad thing is there is very little people can do once the process has begun and little comfort that comes from knowing how common it is. Because miscarriage rates are so high likely someone you know has gone through it. Nicole is glad she told friends later about the miscarriage because two other friends suffered losses and they were able to reach out to her for support. Tania reached out to close friends who had previously miscarried. Their support was pinnacle in feeling "not so alone" however everyone grieves differently - she still felt isolated with her own unique situation and the pain associated with it.

2) Whenever we experience one loss, we unlock a world of old wounds and losses. As we grieve for our babies, we may also be faced with unresolved or ongoing pain from the loss of a loved one or other loss or trauma in our life.

3) There are multiple layers of grief associated with a loss in pregnancy: loss of the child as well as all of the couple's hopes and dreams for that child, the physical loss of no longer having life growing inside you and all the expectations that go along with being pregnant. Different times will trigger different losses and anniversary reactions can be especially difficult. If many people did not know about the pregnancy, there is the added shame and embarrassment of having to share with others something so personal and raw. Nicole remembers feeling disconnected during this time because the pregnancy ended so early and no one even knew they were trying. Tania felt embarrassed as many close friends and family knew about their pregnancy. She also felt ashamed of how her body let her down.

4) People grieve in different ways. Partners may not feel the loss as acutely because they lack that physical connection to the baby. It is important to let your partner know exactly what you need and validate their experience of grief without feeling like they are minimizing yours in any way if their reaction is not as intense. This too is a normal process of grief. We live in a fast paced society that does not often allow the necessary time for grieving. It is important to honour your emotions and carve out as much time as you need to heal. Nicole cried weekly for a few months and sees this as a significant part of her grieving process. Tania felt angry, isolated and confused about her loss.

Some women will refer to their loss as a "fetus," "baby," or "child." For each person their loss is

different depending on how far along in the pregnancy they were.

5) Emotionally and physically you need time to heal. Do not try to get pregnant again right away. Talk to your Midwife or Doctor about the physical healing time that is needed for your body. Everyone heals emotionally and physically at different rates. There is no set healing time for grief.

6) Reach out to others but also honour your boundaries. Seek professional support if the grief feels overwhelming. Journal and consider writing a goodbye letter to your baby. Nicole found the support of a personal therapist essential during this difficult time and found the goodbye letter a special way to honour the child she never met and to move forward to trying for another child. Tania also sought the support of a therapist to work through her emotions. She felt comforted surrounded by trees and spent time in nature on her own and with her family walking in the woods. She took comfort in her son and he reminded her of the future. Some women and their families plant a special tree, flower or little garden as a sign of remembrance. Look for the opportunity within this crisis. Honour your body by getting a massage and/or reiki treatment. Nicole found massage a great way to “forgive” her body by nurturing it. Reiki helped to rebalance her energy. Tania had a massage with a trained pre and postnatal massage therapist who gently suggested a belly massage, Tania was able to let go and forgive her body. Eat well and follow up on any possible health concerns that may affect your fertility or may aid in your healing.

There are many natural and effective treatments and approaches to restoring optimum health.

- 1) Homeopathy is a very useful, safe and gentle way to help with loss. Ignatia 30C is commonly used for symptoms of grief and despair.
- 2) Essential fatty acids, especially Omega 3 (fish oils, higher in EPA over DHA 2:1) are useful in gently guiding the hormones back to rebalance and reducing postpartum depression.
- 3) B-Vitamins found in whole grains such as rye, barley, brown rice, millet and quinoa provide support to the central nervous system and adrenal (stress) glands. They take the edge off of stress and help ease the emotions.
- 4) Probiotics or “healthy bacteria” help to restore good bacteria to the vaginal and intestinal tract and help to ensure you are absorbing key nutrients like folic acid, iron and other b vitamins.
- 5) Dandelion tea is recommended to help cleanse the liver. The liver metabolizes all hormones in the

human body. Nettle tea is very healing and contains both iron and calcium.

Physical – Some things to consider: your hormones need to adjust, your blood supply may need replenishing and your uterus needs to return to a healthy shape and size and heal, especially if invasive procedures occurred.

When you start your healing process get outside to be with nature, some women find they are drawn to the water and others prefer to be within the safety of a forest. Walking is effective in preventing and/or reducing symptoms of depression. Some women need to spend time alone and others crave to be with their friends and family constantly.

Dealing with Other’s responses: A healthy balance of solitude and time with others is suggested to ensure that you are dealing with and processing your experience at your own pace without isolating yourself. It is okay to choose not to attend an upcoming baby shower or other social function that may be too triggering. People may respond in many different ways to your news especially if they have not experienced this type of a loss. They may sound cold or unkind with words like “You can always try again,” “You are so young/too old,” etc. People often have the best intentions at heart however their approach is likely not going to mesh with the overwhelming depth of emotions you are experiencing or what you need. Realize what you need, check in with yourself and verbalize it so your loved ones can help pass along to others what is most helpful: a visit, a warm meal, some time on your own.

Take comfort in knowing: The huge majority of women including Nicole and Tania have gone on to have successful pregnancies. That in itself is the most healing of all.

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