

Ob/Gyn

Associates of Holland P.C.



Miscarriage

You have learned that you will miscarry your baby early in your pregnancy. We are very sorry for the loss you are experiencing. This can be an overwhelming time full of many emotions and decisions. You may have thought something was wrong with your pregnancy or this could be totally unexpected. We hope to help you understand what happens during a miscarriage and provide information that may help you make decisions along with your healthcare provider.

About a Miscarriage

Miscarriage occurs in up to 1 in 4 pregnancies and most often it is the result of chromosomal or genetic abnormalities. There are many ways to react to a pregnancy ending in miscarriage. Many women will be very saddened by this loss and others may feel it is something that just happens. The feelings we have are personal and there is no right or wrong way to feel. Also, the length of time that you were pregnant with this baby does not necessarily correlate with the loss you feel. If there was attachment to this baby, there will be grief. Losing a baby through miscarriage is a physical and emotional journey that will take time to heal and it is normal if you and your partner have different responses.

Options for Managing a Miscarriage

You may hear terms from your provider regarding your miscarriage such as “spontaneous abortion” or “inevitable abortion.” These are medical terms used to describe the pregnancy loss. There may be a few options to facilitate the miscarriage and you and your provider can discuss what is best for you.

- **“Wait and see”**: this is an option to just take some time and see what your body will do to pass the baby and pregnancy tissue and miscarry on its own. This could take anywhere from hours to several days to start and usually will be completed within a few hours when your body actively begins the process. (see the section on Miscarriage at home)
- **Medication**: It may be an option to have your provider give you medication to swallow or put in your vagina to help your uterus begin to cramp and then pass the baby and pregnancy tissue. This process will usually start within a couple hours from the medication being taken and will be completed a few hours after that, however sometimes additional doses are necessary.
- **D&C (Dilation and Curettage)**: this is a procedure that is done in the hospital while you are asleep under anesthesia. The doctor opens the cervix and removes the pregnancy tissue. This is an outpatient procedure and typically you may go home a few hours following the procedure.

Note: There are times when a woman may have a miscarriage that happens on their own or with medication but all the tissue does not pass and they continue to have heavy bleeding. This is called an “incomplete abortion.” You may need an emergency D&C to finish the miscarriage if this occurred.

What to expect if my miscarriage happens at home, with or without medication

Many women who experience an early miscarriage with or without medication will begin with abdominal cramping and vaginal spotting/bleeding that can last for several hours. Some people feel better being close to the bathroom during this time or resting wearing a nighttime maxi pad. You can also put plastic or incontinence pads on your bed if needed. At some point during a miscarriage, you will feel strong cramping and will pass the baby, blood, clots and tissue, this can take a few hours to complete. If you needed medication to help with pain and do not have allergies to these medications, you could use Motrin (Ibuprofen) 600-800mg every 8 hours as needed and/or Tylenol (Acetaminophen) 500-1000mg every 6 hours as needed.

Complications

It is considered normal to have mild bleeding or discharge and cramping for several days or weeks once the miscarriage is complete. Please contact your Health Care Provider if you experience any of the following:

- continued large amounts of bleeding where you soak a large maxi pad two times in an hour or are passing clots larger than a golf ball.
- feeling lightheaded, feeling like you may pass out.
- fever greater than 100.4 F or foul-smelling vaginal bleeding or discharge.
- concern about any other symptoms or the discomfort is not tolerable.
- Please also let your doctor know if you have miscarried at home so they can arrange proper follow up if necessary. When you see or talk to your provider, you can ask about next steps moving forward.

Pathology evaluation and/or genetic testing on fetal tissue delivered at home is an option. Please contact your provider if you would like more information on this.

What do I do with my baby?

When you have a miscarriage, it can be difficult to know what to do with the baby. Depending on your gestation at the time of loss, it can be very difficult to identify the baby in the blood, clots and pregnancy tissue that has passed. For some, after the miscarriage is complete, they feel comfortable discarding the tissue. For others, they would like other options whether the miscarriage happened at home or after a D&C.

If you complete the miscarriage of your baby at home, you may care for the remains in whatever way brings you comfort. You may discard the tissue if you wish or burial/cremation may also be an option. Many of our local funeral homes work well with families to greatly reduce costs of burial or cremation. If this is an option you are considering, please call a funeral home to discuss your options. Sometimes in early pregnancy there may not be enough tissue to cremate and receive ashes. If you choose to have a funeral home handle any remains of your baby, there is some paperwork that will be required.

Supplies

Some things to have on hand that may be helpful to you:

1. Overnight maxi pads
2. Underpads to put on your bed or to sit on (incontinence section at the store). You can also place one of these on the toilet under the seat to catch the baby and any tissue if you would like to keep it out of the toilet.
3. Small container or doubled ziplock bag to put baby/tissue in if desired or if you would like it analyzed. Ask your provider if having the remains analyzed would be recommended.
4. Gloves to identify and hold the baby, if desired.
5. Pain medication approved by your provider.

What to expect if I need a D&C

If you decide to schedule a D&C to resolve your miscarriage or need one after a miscarriage at home here are a few things to expect. You will have the procedure in the Surgery department at the hospital where you will receive an IV and possibly some lab work prior to the procedure. You will be put to sleep by an anesthesia provider for the short procedure and will be in the recovery room for a few hours afterward before you would be discharged home. They will review some paperwork options with you as to what your wishes are regarding what you would like to have happen with the remains of your baby after the procedure.

What to do with my baby?

If you choose to have a D&C procedure in the hospital, the baby and tissue unfortunately cannot be returned to you but you do have options. You may choose the hospital to care for the remains of the baby and pregnancy tissue by cremation at no cost to you but you would not receive any ashes. You may possibly choose for the remains to go to a funeral home for burial or cremation following the procedure, but it will be dependent on how much tissue is obtained after the procedure and if you wanted it to be analyzed in the lab. If there is tissue remaining after the lab analysis and you would like for it to go to a funeral home for burial or cremation, the hospital will provide you with the proper paperwork for this option. If you are considering this, please contact a funeral home prior to your procedure to ask if this would be an option for you.

Emotions after pregnancy loss:

Feelings about pregnancy loss can vary from person to person. For some, this may be a time of intense sadness. Many women and their partners will experience feelings of grief, this feeling is normal and different for each person. Continue to talk about your feelings of sadness, loss, and grief with your partner or trusted close friends and family. Know the intensity of these feelings will lessen over time, but the baby you carried had a place in your family and that loss will be remembered. We encourage you to name your baby, even without knowing the gender, as this will help you hold space for your baby in your family. You can also create some mementos in memory of your baby such as an ultrasound photo, make or buy a bracelet, buy a memory stone, holiday ornament or other things to help honor the life of your baby. Some families also find it helpful to have an informal memorial service as these kinds of rituals can be helpful in processing your loss. Some parents find it helpful to keep mementos in a memory box or create a shadow box to display.

If the feelings of loss and grief are keeping you from caring for yourself or your family, or you feel too overwhelmed by them, please contact your Health Care Provider. If you have struggled with depression or anxiety in the past, you may be at a greater risk to have those feelings return as you work through this loss.

There are a few local support groups you can reach out to for further guidance. Faith45 is a local faith-based foundation that will provide someone to walk with you during this time to provide support, www.faith-45.com. Star Legacy Foundation, is a national organization and their local chapter's website is www.starlegacyfoundation.org/west-michigan-chapter/. If you need a grief counselor, you can go to www.psychologytoday.com/us/therapists and find a counselor in your area.

You are also invited to honor your baby at the Annual Pregnancy and Infant Loss Memorial Service at Holland Hospital the third Thursday of every October. This is a time to feel supported and honor the life of your baby with your family. Please look for registration information on the Holland Hospital website calendar in October for specific details and registration information.

What about after my miscarriage?

The physical symptoms and what your body feels from a miscarriage will usually get better within a few days but the emotional affects may last longer. Giving yourself time to heal is important.

Contact your provider for follow up care and to discuss your plans going forward. It is best to stop sexual intercourse until you have allowed your body time to heal and discussed it with your provider. Know that your body may ovulate again with a couple weeks so you could become pregnant again quickly or it may take some time.

We want to express our sympathy for your loss. Please follow up with your Health Care Provider if you have any further concerns or questions.

Your Care Team at OB/GYN Associates of Holland