

## What I Didn't Expect When I Was No Longer Expecting

Because there is no manual for how to cope with a miscarriage.

By Chaunie Brusie



Before it happened to me, I had no idea what to expect from a miscarriage. I didn't know it was possible to be pregnant and planning for a baby one day and then have your world come crashing around you the next.

And although I was grateful to find plenty of love and support after my miscarriage from women who have gone through loss before me, the journey of knowing what to expect when I was no longer expecting was still one filled with a lot of surprises. Honestly, I wish that someone would have told me more of what I could expect from a miscarriage, because it would have helped me a lot. Here are a few of the practical things you can expect if you are going through a miscarriage or have just found out that you will be miscarrying:

### **1. There are many different types of loss.**

When you hear about someone having a miscarriage, you might think they all kind of happen the same way, but that is not the case. There are many different types of loss—there are early losses and later losses, first and second trimester losses, and many others in between. A woman may miscarry suddenly by bleeding and losing the baby physically, or she might not realize that the baby has passed away until she gets an ultrasound. The types of loss can physically be very different from one another and so can the emotional experience of miscarriage.

### **2. A miscarriage can be a long process.**

This was one of the most surprising things about my loss. I had always thought that a miscarriage happens quickly and for some women, it does. Many women I talked to went through a few hours of labor and then passed the baby and the miscarriage was considered complete.

My loss, however, was very different. From start to finish, my miscarriage took over two months. I physically bled for two straight months and I felt like I was very alone in going through such an excruciating and exhausting journey. I had no idea that a pregnancy loss could drag out for such a long time, but in certain situations, it can.

### **3. You might never actually see your baby.**

For some women, actually seeing the baby is something that is important to them and can help them heal. Other women, however, may not get the opportunity to physically see their baby. About 50 percent of miscarriages in the first trimester are due to a blighted ovum, which means that although the gestational sac and all of the pregnancy hormones are present, the embryo never fully develops. Other women might need a D&C (dilation and curettage, a minor surgical procedure that removes any remaining pregnancy tissue in the uterus) and in that case they may not have the chance to see the baby either.

My miscarriage happened without a developed embryo, so I never physically saw my baby. Not seeing the embryo affected how I grieved, because I felt like I didn't have the right to feel as sad as other mothers did. But knowing now that many other mothers never physically see their babies either has helped me to realize that I was not alone. A loss is a loss, and each person's grief journey is just as valid as the next.

### **4. Your periods will probably be a lot heavier after your miscarriage.**

Maybe this is something that other women just instinctively know, but my first period after my miscarriage completely blindsided me because it was *awful*. In all honesty, I bled more during my first period after the loss than I did in the two months I was miscarrying. It took me completely by surprise and I definitely wish that someone had warned me, because of course, my first period happened when I was away for that weekend and had packed only—you guessed it—white pants. (Murphy's Law, right?)

I did some research and found that it's pretty common for the first few cycles after a loss to be very heavy, with severe cramps and clots. Some women also experienced total reverse symptoms. For example, if your

cycles have been heavy your whole life, they may actually get lighter after a loss or vice a versa. For me, it took three complete heavy cycles for my period to return back to normal, which was a relief.

## **5. There is no shame in talking about your loss.**

When I was going through the physical process of my miscarriage, I wondered if I would ever truly feel normal again. I'm not exaggerating when I say that I cried non-stop for almost two months straight. I wore sunglasses to pick up my kids from school, ordered my groceries online, and did anything I could to actually avoid interacting with people because I just couldn't seem to control my outbursts of tears.

Looking back, what I experienced was very normal, but at the time, I really did wonder if I was normal. The truth is, there is no "one" way to grieve a miscarriage, and everyone might experience it differently, but if you are in the can't-stop-crying phase, please know that it's completely normal and there will come a time when you can get through the day without sobbing. More importantly, you should realize that there is nothing to be ashamed about if others see you crying about your loss. I had moments I couldn't control my tears in front of my dental hygienist, my mom's trainer at the gym, and my son's preschool teacher, and you know what? Every single one of those people told me that they had personally experienced a miscarriage too. There is no reason to hide your loss and chances are, it will make you feel less alone to talk about it.

## **6. There will always be hard days.**

Even after you make it through your initial weeks of grief and crying, you should know that there will be hard days. It's been almost four months since my miscarriage now, and there are still triggers for me. Seeing a woman who is pregnant, having an acquaintance we haven't seen in a long

time tease me about not having another baby yet, knowing that I will have to face a due date that won't ever come, and even strange instances, like driving down the road this morning and realizing there could have been another person in our car with us, can bring the tears back instantly for me. The truth is, it's all hard and that is OK. No one said you ever had to "get over" a miscarriage, and honoring your grief and emotions is important. Someone once told me that our tears are just an outward sign of how much love we had for that baby, and that has helped me a lot whenever I feel embarrassed about how sad I feel.

## **7. You can be at risk for PPD after a miscarriage.**

It's important to realize that when you have a miscarriage, your body goes through an enormous amount of change in a very short time. The pregnancy hormones may linger in your body for quite some time, depending on what type of loss you've experienced, or they may drop drastically—but either way, those hormonal changes, along with the grief and difficult emotions of a miscarriage, can put you at risk for developing postpartum depression. One study showed that women who had experienced a miscarriage previously were at risk for PPD even after going on to have a healthy baby. Your feelings about losing this pregnancy won't be replaced, and they are very real. I could feel myself change after my miscarriage, and I struggled a lot with the mental and emotional aspects of the loss, especially in my anxiety levels. I found myself very anxious and prone to having panic attacks and worrying about the worst-case scenarios. I became obsessed with small things and would have to check constantly to make sure I didn't forget one of my other kids at home (even while we were already driving in the car and they were safely buckled up with me). Some degree of hormonal change and emotional changes are normal, of course, but you should realize that just because you didn't have a baby to show for it, you still went through a pregnancy and your body still went through a significant physical trauma. Just like when you have a baby, you

should check in with yourself about how you are feeling; have an open and honest discussion with your partner, if applicable, about watching for signs and symptoms you may miss; and also talk with your doctor if you are experiencing any significant mental changes past six weeks that are affecting your daily activities.

The bottom line is, we hear a lot about what women can expect when they are expecting. But knowing what to expect when you are no longer expecting deserves to be talked about too.