Coping with Miscarriage

A miscarriage, or spontaneous abortion, is when the embryo or fetus is expelled from the uterus before it's able to live outside. Any spontaneous pregnancy loss that occurs during the first 20 weeks of a pregnancy is considered a miscarriage (though the majority of such losses occur before weeks 12 to 14).

Regardless of whether the first sign of the loss of a baby was slight spotting or heavy bleeding, the end of pregnancy symptoms, or no sign of a heartbeat on an ultrasound, a loss during pregnancy will affect you profoundly, often leaving you feeling depressed, deeply sad, angry, confused, and alone.

**What happened?**

Most early miscarriages aren't random — they happen for a reason. And though it certainly doesn't feel that way when you're the one coping with pregnancy loss, an early miscarriage is usually a good new in disguise. Between 50 and 75 percent of miscarriages that take place within the first 12 to 14 weeks occur because the embryo or fetus was defective in some way. The fetus may have been unable to implant in the uterus, or implanted poorly; it may have suffered from a genetic aberration; there may have been significant chromosomal abnormalities that weren't compatible with life. Whatever the cause, the result was that the embryo or fetus was unable to develop normally.

Later miscarriages (between the end of the first trimester and week 20) are typically due to maternal health issues, the condition of the uterus or cervix, or problems with the placenta rather than because of fetal abnormalities. It's possible that what you and your practitioner learn from this experience can help a future pregnancy last to term.

**Why am I the one coping with a miscarriage?**

You're coping with pregnancy loss because it can happen to anybody — regardless of race, health, economic class, age, or other factors. Don't turn the responsibility inward: It wasn't your fault, you are not to blame, and you didn't do anything to deserve this. Certain factors may have increased your risk: Women over 35 are more likely to miscarry than women in their 20s, certain uterine abnormalities can play a role as can genetic or immune factors, and having certain diseases or disorders such as diabetes, lupus, or low progesterone may also contribute. But many perfectly
healthy women have miscarriages every year. Be kind to yourself, and try not to compound your sadness with guilt. Any woman can wind up coping with a miscarriage, and few will ever know why.

Why am I so upset about the loss of a baby, and when will I feel better?

The grief you're feeling is real — no matter how early in pregnancy you experienced the loss of a baby, you'll feel that loss deeply. Even if you never saw your baby, you knew that he or she was growing inside of you, and you formed a bond; however abstract the attachment, you felt it. The baby was responsible for your emotions during pregnancy. From the moment you found out you were pregnant, you imagined yourself a mother — and then, all the excitement of forthcoming months (and years, and decades) abruptly came to a halt. It's understandably painful, and it's normal to feel disheartened and depressed, angry that it happened to you, perhaps withdrawn from friends and family. You may have trouble sleeping and eating — and accepting. These are all natural, healthy responses to the death of a loved one (and you loved your baby, even if you never had a chance to know your baby), something you're enduring right now.

If you have partner, find together the support (remember that other's mourning the loss of a baby, too, though the other person may show the grief in a different way). Sharing your feelings openly with each other, rather than trying to protect each other, will help you both heal. If you are a single mother find help in your family or friends. Share your grief with a good friend, too, if that might be helpful — but don't feel compelled to talk to anyone if you don't feel like it. If you find the depression too difficult to bear, ask your practitioner to recommend a therapist or bereavement group to assist you through this difficult period. Talking to others who have shared a similar loss (support groups, online support boards) can also help. In time, and with patience, your suffering will end; take as long as you need to mend your broken heart. And try to remind yourself that you can — and you will — become pregnant again and give birth to a healthy child. For the vast majority of women, a miscarriage is a one-time event — and actually, an indication of future fertility.