



## Allowing your miscarriage to happen naturally

We are sincerely sorry for your loss and we hope this information will support you to manage your miscarriage naturally. There are medical descriptions that may be distressing to you as you read through this information, but support is available through the Early Pregnancy clinic.

There are a number of reasons why a baby stops developing and a pregnancy ends early, but often there is no reason at all. Your doctor will talk to you about what has happened to your pregnancy and the next steps to take. One option is to let your body miscarry naturally. This means that there is no medical intervention and your body expels the pregnancy tissue while you rest at home. This happens gradually from a period of a few days to weeks.

### What are the benefits of a natural miscarriage?

- About 80% of women who have started to bleed will continue to have a natural miscarriage within 4 weeks so it is reasonable to take the wait and see approach and let your body handle this
- The advantage of having a natural miscarriage is that you can avoid some of the complications of surgery and adverse effects of medications used to help miscarriage happen
- If the wait and see approach does not work then you can still have surgery if it is needed

### What are the risks of natural miscarriage?

- Natural miscarriage is not successful for everyone and some women still need to have surgery or require medication
- Some women develop a uterine infection that can be treated with antibiotics
- Some women have very persistent pain that is not helped with usual pain killers

### Is there any reason why I can't have a natural miscarriage?

The following are situations where it is not advisable to have a natural miscarriage:

- Very heavy bleeding with low blood pressure or anaemia
- Uterine infection (smelly vaginal discharge, fever or pain)
- A contraceptive device (coil/loop) in your uterus
- If you have had three or more miscarriages
- If you are more than 12 weeks pregnant
- Some other less common reasons that your doctor can explain to you

### Anti-D

If you have a rhesus negative blood group, then an injection of Anti-D is recommended so that you do not make antibodies to a subsequent rhesus positive baby. You need to have this injection within 72 hours of starting your miscarriage. Talk to your GP about how you can get this injection.

Women who are Rhesus negative will receive more information on Rhesus negative blood type and Anti-D injection.

### What should I expect when I have the miscarriage

Unfortunately, like all women having a miscarriage, the main features are bleeding and pain. The information below will help you manage these.

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### Pain and Cramping

You are likely to experience lower abdominal cramping and lower back pain. This is your body trying to expel the pregnancy tissue. The pain may continue for 3-4 days after you have miscarried.

#### Coping strategies

- Take regular pain relief. You get better relief if you take Paracetamol and Ibuprofen together. DO NOT exceed the recommended daily dose
- Companionship is important, so have a support person to stay with you and help you feel safe and cared for
- A massage or a simple touch can be comforting when experiencing pain. This varies from holding hands or having a light stroking on your back.
- Alternating hot and cold compresses can help but be aware that it is easy to get burned as you may not be sensitive to the extremes of heat and cold
- Deep relaxation breathing or meditation may help
- Having soothing music can create distraction

### Bleeding

You can expect some vaginal bleeding which can be heavy with some clots. This should only last for a short time (up to 3 - 4 hours). During this time, the pregnancy tissue will pass. The heavy bleeding can be distressing to see, but it is a normal part of the process. The bleeding usually settles to a "period-like" bleeding within a few hours. After that, you should expect the period-like bleeding to decrease to light bleeding which should slowly settle and stop within approximately 2 weeks.

#### Coping strategies

- Make sure you have a supply of thick sanitary pads
- Change your pads regularly
- Keep a record of clots with pregnancy tissue
- Talk to your GP or the early pregnancy nurse if you are concerned

#### Go to the emergency department if:

- **Your bleeding is so heavy that you are soaking more than one sanitary pad every hour beyond the 4 hours of heavy bleeding**
- **You are feeling unwell, lightheaded, dizzy or faint**
- **Your pain is persistently severe and it is not relieved by pain medication**

### Miscarriage

For a lot of women the pregnancy tissue passes unnoticed into the toilet along with blood clots. You may see a sac or bubble with an embryo that looks like pinkish white tissue or you may see a dark greyish clot that does not disintegrate and feels more solid.

If you are collecting the pregnancy tissue either for burial or pre-arranged testing, some women find using a sieve helpful in collecting it. If the tissue needs to go for testing you can take it to your local Labtests in a small plastic bag. If you are unable to go straight away it can be kept in a cold dry place for up to 3 days. If you want the tissue to be returned to you after testing then make sure the lab staff record this clearly. For privacy purposes, you could call the Labtests and inform them you will be bringing your pregnancy tissue for testing. This will ensure no unnecessary questions will be asked in public so your privacy is maintained.

The tissue is tested for rare cancer cells and if these are negative (and they generally are) no further testing is required. If you want to have other testing done, discuss this with the medical staff.

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### After passing the pregnancy tissue

Once the pregnancy tissue has passed and you now have normal bleeding.

#### How to avoid an infection

- Use sanitary pads not tampons
- Shower regularly and avoid sitting in open baths until your bleeding stops
- Avoid sitting in spas or swimming until your bleeding stops
- Avoid having sex until your bleeding has stopped
- If you have been given a course of antibiotics finish the course even if you feel well

#### Signs of infection

- Flu-like symptoms and feeling feverish
- Temperature over 38 degrees
- Heavier bleeding or you start passing clots
- Unpleasant smelling vaginal discharge
- Pain or difficulty passing urine

If you have any signs of infection please call your GP immediately and make an appointment for a complete assessment.

#### Contraception and Fertility

It can take about 5-8 weeks for your period to return; however you can get pregnant before your period returns. Make sure you are taking contraception. If you are planning to get pregnant again, we recommend you wait until you have had a normal period. It might take about 3-4 months for a menstrual cycle to return to normal.

### Follow up at home

- You may choose to be under the care of your GP or the Early Pregnancy clinic
- If you choose the Early Pregnancy clinic, you will be contacted once a week by a nurse to check on your progress
- Should you have any concerns you are welcome to phone or text the clinic on 021 243 9729 between 9am and 4pm from Monday to Friday
- If your call is not answered, please leave a message clearly stating your name and NHI number so you can be contacted as soon as the nurse is free
- If you have any urgent concerns after hours please present to the hospital

If at any stage you change your mind and decide you would like to discuss other options for management, please ring the Early Pregnancy Clinic on 021 243 9729 and speak to the nurse who will arrange for you to see the doctor.

### Further information and counseling support

After experiencing a miscarriage you and your family may find you need additional support. It is important that you allow your body to recover physically and give yourself time to grieve for your loss. Ask the doctor for a medical certificate for time off work if you feel you need it.

Everyone reacts differently to a miscarriage, some are sad, some are angry, some relieved and others experience all of the above. It is important to accept your feelings, whatever they are. Discuss how you are feeling with a close family member or friend.

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If you would like to talk about your miscarriage you can:

- Phone a women's Health Social Worker at North Shore or Waitakere Hospital via the hospital operator on 09 486 8900 for North Shore Hospital and 09 839 0000 for Waitakere Hospital.
- Visit the miscarriage Support Group website [www.miscarriagesupport.org.nz](http://www.miscarriagesupport.org.nz)
- Phone the miscarriage support line on 09 378 4060
- Visit SANDS New Zealand Support (pregnancy, baby and infant loss support) website [www.sands.org.nz](http://www.sands.org.nz)
- Phone the Early Pregnancy Clinic on 021 243 9729

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