

Common reactions and ways to cope in a new pregnancy after pregnancy loss

Patient information and support tool

Pregnancy after Pregnancy Loss Information Tool

Nothing can completely take away the fear and uncertainty you feel about a new pregnancy.

But it can help to have your feelings acknowledged, learn about what others often feel and to know that you are not alone.

There are also things that you can do to help you cope with these feelings. This tool will address each of these topics. We hope you find it helpful.

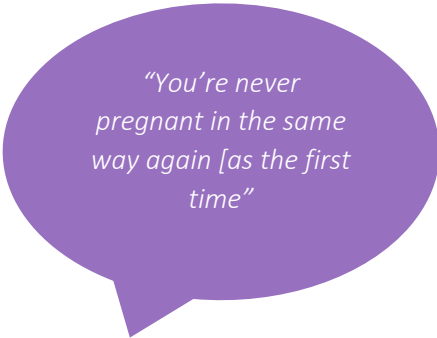
COMMON REACTIONS

“If you get the information and you know it’s common to have this – it really gives you a lot of comfort. I just think information during all this is key”

Although these reactions can be experienced by **both** partners, the following primarily focuses on the pregnant partner. See separate information tool for partners. Some information is repeated in both.

Trying to get pregnant again

- You might want to try again right away so that you can move forward but still feel sad about the pregnancy loss
- You could be worried about whether you can get pregnant again
- You could be worried about having another pregnancy loss and how you will cope with that



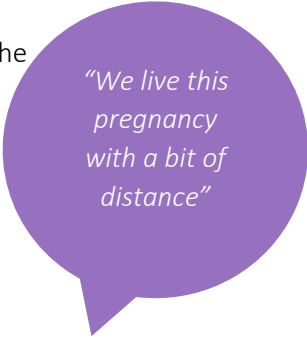
“You’re never pregnant in the same way again [as the first time]”

Early pregnancy

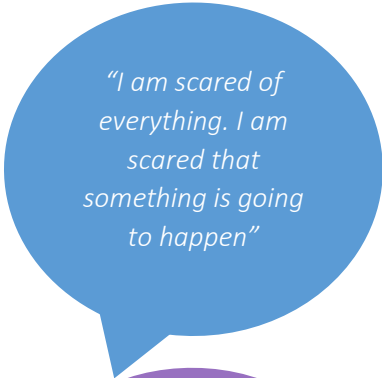
Being pregnant again after a pregnancy loss can be hard. It can be filled with mixed emotions of hope, fear, uncertainty, relief, grief, and worry/anxiety.

You might:

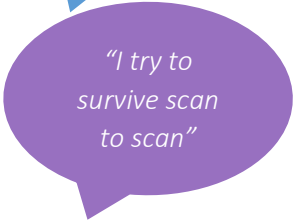
- Feel you're not pregnant in the same way this time – it can be hard to believe the new pregnancy will be successful
- Try not to become too attached to the pregnancy for fear of losing again
- Feel nervous, anxious and worried, especially around the time of the prior pregnancy loss: will we lose again?
- Feel guilty about not being as excited about the new pregnancy
- Go back and forth between hope and fear – sometimes in the same day
- Feel isolated from other pregnant friends or family members who are happy about being pregnant
- Feel upset or misunderstood by others who say you should be / must be happy you are pregnant again
- Wish for scans to confirm the pregnancy is OK, but also feel like scans are only temporary relief measures – the worry can return afterwards. It's common to feel nervous before a scan, to feel some immediate relief after the scan, and to feel the worry and uncertainty return afterwards given that you only know the pregnancy is secure in that moment



"We live this pregnancy with a bit of distance"



"I am scared of everything. I am scared that something is going to happen"



"I try to survive scan to scan"

Mid-pregnancy

The 20 week scan is a big milestone: it's common to feel some relief at knowing that things look OK.

You might:

- Feel some shift towards more hope but still have some worries
- Feel some relief when the baby starts to move: "proof of life". But if the baby is not moving as much one day, it might still be stressful
- Wish for the occasional scan to confirm the baby is OK
- Feel that the pregnancy gets easier some days but not feel completely confident about everything turning out OK

"Even though you have worries you have good days too"

"If it's kicking then it's fine. But if it's not kicking that much then I get panicked"

"It's becoming something we dare to believe in more. But there's no doubt that compared to someone that doesn't have our history there's a difference"

Later pregnancy

You might:

- Feel there are more hopes than worries in this phase
- Feel more confident about the health of the baby
- Start to make some plans regarding the birth of the baby
- Start to feel the pregnancy gets easier and wonder if this must be what a "normal" pregnancy feels like
- Feel like you won't be fully secure until you have your baby in your arms

"It's more of a countdown than a count up now"

"I think it's true that we would not be completely relaxed until he's there in our arms"

COPING STRATEGIES

Different types of coping

Coping strategies are the way we deal with stress and uncomfortable emotions.

Men and women may have different preferred ways of coping in a new pregnancy, but they share the same goal of trying to manage the distress caused by the pregnancy loss(es) and new pregnancy.

Common types of coping:

Problem focused coping: these are thoughts and behaviours to try to solve the problem such as seeking information, making a plan for action, and taking action: this can be seen as the 'doing' way of coping.

Emotion focused coping: these are thoughts and behaviours to manage your emotional reaction to the problem such as expressing feelings through talking with others, journaling, focusing on the positive: this can be seen as the 'processing' way of coping.

Social support: is another form of coping that involves seeking emotional and practical support from others.

Specific coping strategies and tips for coping during pregnancy

Accepting that a new pregnancy is likely to be stressful at times can help you cope better along with finding other strategies to make it easier in the day-to-day:

Taking it milestone by milestone or one day at a time.

People who have been through this before say that taking it milestone by milestone is what helped them cope the most since looking too far ahead could be overwhelming. Key milestones were getting past the week of the prior pregnancy loss(es), reaching the 12 week scan and the 20 week scan. Others needed to take it day by day or week by week.



"I like to look at it by day and by week. It helps me you know Friday is the start of the next week and then we just go week at a time and that's all we look at"

Find ways to be in the present moment: practice mindfulness.

Mindfulness brings your mind into the present moment rather than thinking ahead (worrying/feeling anxious) or backwards (feeling sad). The 3 aspects of mindfulness are:

- a) Awareness: of your present experience, being present, observing and noticing your thoughts, emotions and sensations with curiosity (not judgment).
- b) Acceptance: of your present experience, even the painful parts. No judging, analyzing, criticizing, planning, avoiding, distracting. Trusting that every moment changes and bad times will too. **Accepting how you feel makes it easier to move through it.**
- c) Self-compassion: using self-talk that is kind, supportive and non-judgmental.

Focusing on your breathing is one form of mindfulness. Other mindfulness-based strategies: Yoga, gentle massage, acupuncture, hypnosis, breathing exercises, progressive muscle relaxation, visualization, mindfulness meditation. There are many apps that can offer mindfulness exercises such as Headspace, Calm, and others.

Try a grounding exercise.

These are an extension of mindfulness practices where the goal is to focus on your senses rather than your thoughts and emotions in order to reduce overall distress in the moment. Other ways are through paying attention to your senses through a grounding exercise like the “Five things exercise”. There are many ways to do this, but one example is to focus on 5 things that you can see at the moment, 4 things that you can feel, 3 things that you can hear, 2 things that you can smell, and 1 thing that you can taste. See how it gets you out of your head and distress for a few moments?

Practice self-compassion.

Know that you are not alone and how you are feeling is understandable given the difficult circumstances of your previous pregnancy loss(es). Be kind to yourself. Don't beat yourself up for your feelings. Your worries about the pregnancy come from a valid place of having lost before. You may feel hopeful one day and worried the next. It's possible that later in the pregnancy you may have less worries – but you might still feel anxious. It's OK to start feeling hopeful about the pregnancy. However you feel is OK. How you treat yourself is something that is in your control. Think about what you would tell a close friend if they were in the same situation. Try telling yourself the same thing. Remind yourself that these feelings are temporary and you won't always feel this way.

Take care of yourself and what you can control.

Eating nutritious food, getting enough sleep and exercise are things that you can do to feel better overall – but can be harder than you think! These are things that you can do together and individually.

Think about the things that ‘lift you up’ – try to do one at least every day or week.

When under extreme stress and anxiety, it can be easy to forget what you used to enjoy doing. Think about what used to ‘lift you up’ or what you used to enjoy before the pregnancy loss and new pregnancy. Or maybe there is something you always wanted to try. Brainstorm ideas. They can be big or small. Ask yourself when is the last time you did any of these? What is one thing you can do each day / week starting tomorrow? Maybe you can do something together or separately (or both). One couple talked about their love of cooking and how preparing a delicious, nutritious meal each evening was something they could plan and do as a team.

Ask for additional medical care and support.

The standard care in a new pregnancy during early pregnancy in Denmark is a scan at 12 weeks. But it doesn't hurt to inform your general practitioner (GP) if you are worried about your new pregnancy. Some GP practices now include midwives that can provide additional monitoring and support in a new pregnancy before you can access antenatal care. Others may refer to a gynecologist for an additional scan. Some couples pay for private scans. Know that it's OK to ask for additional care and it's OK to feel you need it – you are not alone and not over-reacting.

COPING STRATEGIES

Coping in your relationship

Support each other and seek additional support.

Experiencing a pregnancy loss can be difficult on a relationship. It can be the first time that you have experienced a loss or grieved together. Getting pregnant again can be stressful and put some pressure on the relationship and highlight your differences. It can also strengthen your relationship and your commitment to each other.

There is no set timeline for how to grieve the previous pregnancy loss(es) and or way that you should cope with the current pregnancy.

Partners often grieve and cope differently from each other.

Both partners experience feelings of grief, loss and sadness after a pregnancy loss, but may react, express and cope differently.

Sometimes this can create conflict in your relationship. Women wonder if their partners are as affected as they are, partners feel guilty for 'moving forward' faster than their partners. But it's OK if you don't feel the same grief and if you don't feel sad about the pregnancy loss for the same length of time. Women and men can also express grief differently (e.g., men might feel angry, women feel sad) – it's important to remember that these feelings are grief reactions – in that way you are similar.

It's also OK if your worries and concerns about a new pregnancy are different or if one of you starts feeling more hopeful before the other does. Sometimes it can be helpful to discuss that you are feeling differently – in an accepting and non-judgmental way. For example, saying, "Even though I am starting to feel more hopeful, I understand if you are not." It can also be helpful to find common ground in how you're feeling. For example, most will feel nervous before the first scan in a new pregnancy.

Ultimately if you can accept that you are both in it together but it's OK if you have different reactions or ways of coping, it will help you navigate things more easily.

Take a "time out" from worrying about the pregnancy.

Commit to taking a break from the worries and stress and to being in the moment together and doing something you enjoy.

Plan regular "check-in" times.

It's also important to know that you can have a conversation about how you're feeling even if you feel differently. For example, set a time every day or once or twice a week to debrief. Possible prompts: How I am feeling now is... What I need from you is...

COPING STRATEGIES

Navigating relationships with family, friends and others

Often people have good intentions but don't know what to say (or are clueless). Sometimes people can say things that they think will make you feel better like, "at least you're pregnant now!" but it can feel like your feelings are minimized. It can even feel hurtful.

When deciding how to respond or talk to people about your experience, **consider the importance and closeness of the relationship and tailor your response.**

Consider what do I want to share? What do I need to say to protect myself and/or the relationship? What's most important to me?

Don't be afraid to ask for what you need from the people closest to you or from your manager/colleagues. Be clear and direct.

For example, ask for time off from work or to work from home on the day you have a scan or appointment, ask for assistance with practical items from family/friends, or tell people you'll give them an update when you're ready, or that you want/need them to check in regularly.

Take a time out when you need it.

For example, tell your friends/family/colleagues that you are taking a 'time out' from baby showers and children's birthdays for now.

Be OK with setting a limit or walking away from a conversation.

For example, if someone says to you after a pregnancy loss, "You can just try again" you could say:

- "I know you're trying to help, but it's not as easy as just trying again" and/or
- "What I need from you instead is..."
- "Even though it (pregnancy loss) happens a lot, it isn't easy to just try again"
- "That's true" (and walk away)

Have a secret signal with your partner as an "out" for each other if you find yourselves in a tough conversation.

Educating family and friends:

Give them this information tool to read to help them understand your reactions in a new pregnancy.

They can also read resources about supporting a loved one after pregnancy loss (not pregnancy specific).

The Miscarriage Association: <https://www.miscarriageassociation.org.uk/your-feelings/supporting-someone-through-pregnancy-loss>

RESOURCES AND SUPPORT

Seek additional support – from those who have gone through similar experiences and those who haven't

Feeling supported is linked with better coping for those with pregnancy loss.

Partners are often each other's primary support after pregnancy loss and during a new pregnancy. But that can be a lot of pressure – so it can be helpful to reach out to others for support so you aren't only relying on each other.

Support can come from a variety of sources: a trusted friend or family member, a professional like a psychologist or psychotherapist or others who have gone through similar experiences.

Patients have told us that it would be helpful to hear what others like them have experienced, either by being connected to others (e.g., through a support group) or reading about or watching them talk about their experiences (e.g., through a book or YouTube video).

Possible actions:

- Consider a friend, family member or trusted person in your life with whom you could share how you're feeling.
- Ask your doctor for a referral to a psychologist or search out a psychologist in your area.
- Search for videos on YouTube or social media platforms for personal stories and people sharing their experiences of pregnancy after pregnancy loss. You may need to search and exclude some to find one that speaks to you.
- Read some of the following books and blog posts of other people's experiences:

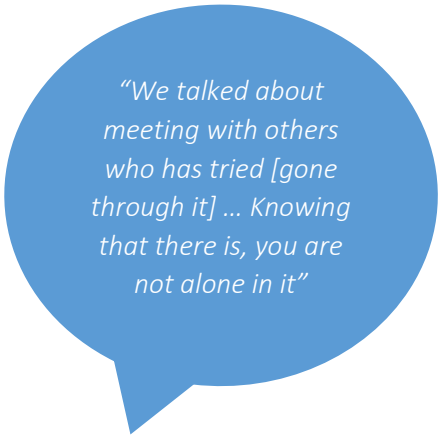
Gammeltoft, L. & Nørgaard, M. (2021). Tabet. Heartbooks. [in Danish, series of essays from experts and patients]

Laasen-Andersen, C. (2020). Tabte Drømme. Forlaget Fjorden [in Danish, personal accounts of pregnancy loss]

- **Attend a network/support meeting with others who are pregnant after pregnancy loss.** Check out the following Danish websites and organizations that include support networks for those with pregnancy loss:

Patientforeningen Fertilitet og Tab-: <https://fertilitetogtab.dk/> [in Danish - national patient organization for infertility and pregnancy loss including network groups for men and women with membership fee, resources and seminars – and connection to private Facebook support group for repeated pregnancy loss]

Landsforeningen Forældre og Sorg: <https://foraeldreogsorg.dk/> [in Danish -free telephone counselling, support groups, workshops for men and women who have lost a child including through pregnancy loss, also articles and personal stories on website]



"We talked about meeting with others who has tried [gone through it] ... Knowing that there is, you are not alone in it"

- Check out other online resources and organizations in English that offer a combination of information and support. Some are specific to pregnancy loss and others have specific sections on pregnancy after pregnancy loss:

Clarke-Coates, Z. (2020). *Pregnancy after loss: a day-to-day plan to reassure and support you*. Orion Spring. – book recommended by previous patient with tips for coping day to day in new pregnancy.

Leis-Newman, E. (2012). *Miscarriage & Loss*. American Psychological Association:
<https://www.apa.org/monitor/2012/06/miscarriage>

Mayo Clinic Pregnancy Loss information: <https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/pregnancy-loss-miscarriage/symptoms-causes/syc-20354298>

SHARE National Pregnancy and Infant Loss Support: <http://nationalshare.org/> --- Providing support, hope and healing for those suffering after pregnancy or infant loss.

The Miscarriage Association: <http://www.miscarriageassociation.org.uk/> --- UK based charity providing resources and support to those who have experienced miscarriage.
<https://www.miscarriageassociation.org.uk/your-feelings/pregnancyaftermiscarriage/> -- about pregnancy after loss

Tommy's Charity: <https://www.tommys.org/baby-loss-support/miscarriage-information-and-support/getting-pregnant-after-miscarriage> - about pregnancy after pregnancy loss

Note: This tool was developed based on a research study following 15 couples during a new pregnancy after one or two pregnancy losses conducted at Hvidovre Hospital, Denmark (Koert et al., 2023) and a review of previous research on this topic. A focus group of 3 couples with pregnancy loss(es) and a stakeholder group of gynecologists, nurse, midwife, psychologist and public health researchers provided input into different stages of the development of the tool. Thank you to all, and especially the couples, for their important contributions. All quotes are from the participants in the research study (Koert et al., 2023).

Coping strategies section: this section was developed based on the findings from the study of pregnant couples (Koert et al., 2023), a review of existing research, and consultation with focus groups and stakeholder group. We intend to develop this section further and to provide more evidence for the effectiveness of specific coping strategies such as mindfulness in reducing distress in couples during pregnancy after pregnancy loss through future studies. For now, these are suggestions of strategies that may help.

Kabat-Zinn, J. (2010). *Wherever you go, there you are: mindfulness meditation for every day life*. 10th Ed. New York: Hachette Books.

Koert, E., Hartwig, T.S., Hviid Malling G.M., Schmidt, L., Nielsen H.S. 'You're never pregnant in the same way again': prior early pregnancy loss influences need for health care and support in subsequent pregnancy. *Human Reproduction Open*. 2023; 2023(3):hoad032. doi: 10.1093/hropen/hoad032. Open access link: <https://doi.org/10.1093/hropen/hoad032>

Lazarus R.S. & Folkman, S. (1984). *Stress, appraisal and coping*. New York: Springer-Verlag.



COPL – Copenhagen Pregnancy Loss cohort



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This project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under the Marie Skłodowska-Curie grant agreement No 101028172 for Dr. Emily Koert.

Pregnancy after Pregnancy Loss tool – page 10

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