

Pregnancy After Loss: Are you ready to start trying again?

It takes courage to try again when your previous pregnancy has ended in miscarriage, stillbirth, or the death of an infant(s). You know that there's a chance that you may experience another loss, but you're willing to risk it all for a shot at the ultimate prize: a healthy baby(ies) that you can call your own.

As committed as you may be to having another baby, it's perfectly normal to feel a bit nervous about planning another pregnancy. After all, you already know that not all pregnancies result in picture-perfect happy endings. Like it or not, the innocence that you enjoyed when you found yourself pregnant for the very first time is gone forever. You can't get it back.

Don't be surprised if you find yourself experiencing a smorgasbord of different emotions when you first make the decision to start trying to conceive - everything from joy, to worry, to outright panic. Some days, you may feel convinced that becoming pregnant again is the only thing that will bring joy back into your life. At other times, you may wonder if you're crazy to even think about exposing yourself to the possibility of heartbreak again.

You may also find that your partner has mixed feelings about trying again, whether or not he's actually willing to express these emotions to you. After all, he's not just worried about the well-being of any future babies you may conceive: he's also worried about the impact of any subsequent losses on you as well as dealing with his own feelings of loss, helplessness and grief.

If you're having difficulty deciding whether or not the two of you are actually ready to embark on another pregnancy, you might find it helpful to consider the following questions:

- ♦ Have you both had a chance to work through some of your grief for the baby or babies who died? Grief can be an exhausting emotion - one that demands far more of your time and attention that you want to give it. Grief is unpredictable and can come to the fore with previously unknown and unplanned stimulants. If your baby(ies) died recently, you may still be going through a very rough time emotionally and you may not be able to embark on another pregnancy just yet.
- ♦ How would you cope if you were to experience fertility problems? If you don't think you'd be able to weather the emotional highs and lows that couples typically experience when they are having trouble conceiving, you might want to postpone your baby making plans a little while longer. While the fact that you managed to conceive in the past means that you have an excellent chance of conceiving again this time around, you have, at best, a 20% chance of conceiving in any given menstrual cycle. That means the odds of being disappointed during the first month or two of trying are extremely high. Are you emotionally strong enough to cope with that disappointment?

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- ♦ How would you cope if you were to experience the death of another baby(ies)? While you may not want to even consider this possibility, it's important to go into your subsequent pregnancy with your eyes wide open. If you're still feeling emotionally fragile, it may be too soon to jump back into the fire again.
- ♦ How would you cope with the stress of a subsequent pregnancy? The worry doesn't end when you manage to conceive. If anything, it's just beginning. That's why it's important to be sure that you're up to coping with the stress of what could very well be the most nerve-wracking 40 weeks of your life.
- ♦ Are you expecting too much of your subsequent pregnancy? If you expect a new pregnancy to wipe away the grief you are feeling for the baby or babies you lost, you are setting your expectations too high. No other baby can possibly take the place of that other baby in your heart. We are different people than we were before our loss. We can learn, however, to place our grief in a place that permits us to move forward with our lives, albeit forever changed.
- ♦ While losing one more or all of multiple birth babies carries its own unique issues, it is important to have tried to come to terms as best as possible with these issues while considering another pregnancy. There is the loss of a unique parenting style. Parenting a singleton child is very different from parenting twins, triplets, quadruplets or more. While pregnant with these multiple babies, fantasies run high as we proudly show them off to friends and families, walk and bathe them in our minds before birth. In our mind, we may even have struggled with how to get the triplet stroller into the car. This unique parenting style is lost when the multiple birth pregnancy changes.
- ♦ Have you considered the possibility of another multiple birth? When multiple birth babies are conceived "spontaneously" or without fertility assistance, there is a marked increase in your chances of conceiving multiples again in subsequent pregnancies. Your age is a facilitating factor as is if you have already had several children. It isn't unheard of to have multiples again after loss. And, of course, those using fertility assistance will also increase their chances of a repeat multiple birth. Consider the family who lost triplets at 22 weeks and then became pregnant with triplets again and carried successfully. Or the family who lost a twin then successfully delivered twins again 18 months later.

One mother who lost twins and found herself pregnant again six months after their loss had some important feedback for others. She noted that she and her husband had difficulties marking the first year anniversaries that arise after a loss: Father's Day, Mother's Day, Birth/Death Day, Christmas, etc. while being pregnant with a new baby. While their new baby is a much wanted treasure, she advises that parents need to be aware of possible conflicting feelings about being pregnant at the same time as dealing with loss emotions around the anniversaries of losses. These unexpected emotions took them completely by surprise.

In addition, Mom noted that as her subsequent pregnancy inadvertently followed one year later the time line of their lost pregnancy, they became aware that they could have been preparing for a birthday party for two 2-year-olds rather

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than celebrating an upcoming first birthday for a singleton. The family was aware that but for their loss, their lives would have been totally different and they needed to work through their feelings in this regard.

While there are a lot of factors to weigh in deciding whether or not you're ready to start trying to conceive again, your best bet is to listen to your heart. Most couples instinctively know whether they're ready again or not. Consider these words of wisdom from Cynthia, 35, who experienced a series of miscarriages before giving birth to her second living child last year: "If you have to consciously decide, then it's probably the wrong time. It's kind of like being in love. You always wondered how you would know when you were, but when you were, you just knew it. I think it's the same. When you're ready to try, you'll want to try. It's really that simple."

Ann Douglas is the co-author of [Trying Again: A Guide to Pregnancy After Miscarriage, Stillbirth, and Infant Loss](#) (Taylor Publishing, October 2000) and [The Unofficial Guide to Having A Baby](#) (IDG Books, 1999). She is the mother of four living children as well as Laura, who was stillborn in October of 1996 as the result of an umbilical cord knot. She can be contacted via her web site at <http://www.having-a-baby.com>

Lynda P. Haddon has been working extensively with multiples and their families for over 20 years. She has three daughters, including dizygotic twins. Her first pregnancy ended in miscarriage. Lynda has created her own multiple birth support website that can be viewed at www.multiplebirthsfamilies.com and has spoken to healthcare professionals regarding the unique issues of loss in multiple birth. Lynda has been Chair of the Loss of Multiples Support Network for Multiple Births Canada for approximately 15 years and has been assisting bereaved multiple birth families for 20 years. She has also revised and revamped Multiple Births Canada's three Loss booklets. She can be reached at loss@multiplebirthscanada.org or through Multiple Births Canada's Business Office at office@multiplebirthscanada.org

Additional Resources:

- *How Can You Help Yourself? Dealing with Grief*, Multiple Births Canada Fact Sheet series
- *Loss of One, More or All Babies*, Multiple Births Canada Fact Sheet series
- *The Loss of a Multiple: Miscarriage, Stillbirth, Infancy*, Multiple Births Canada booklet

Websites:

See the *Loss Support Network* section of the Multiple Births Canada Website for a variety of bereavement support organizations.

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