



*Your Body,  
Your Mind:*

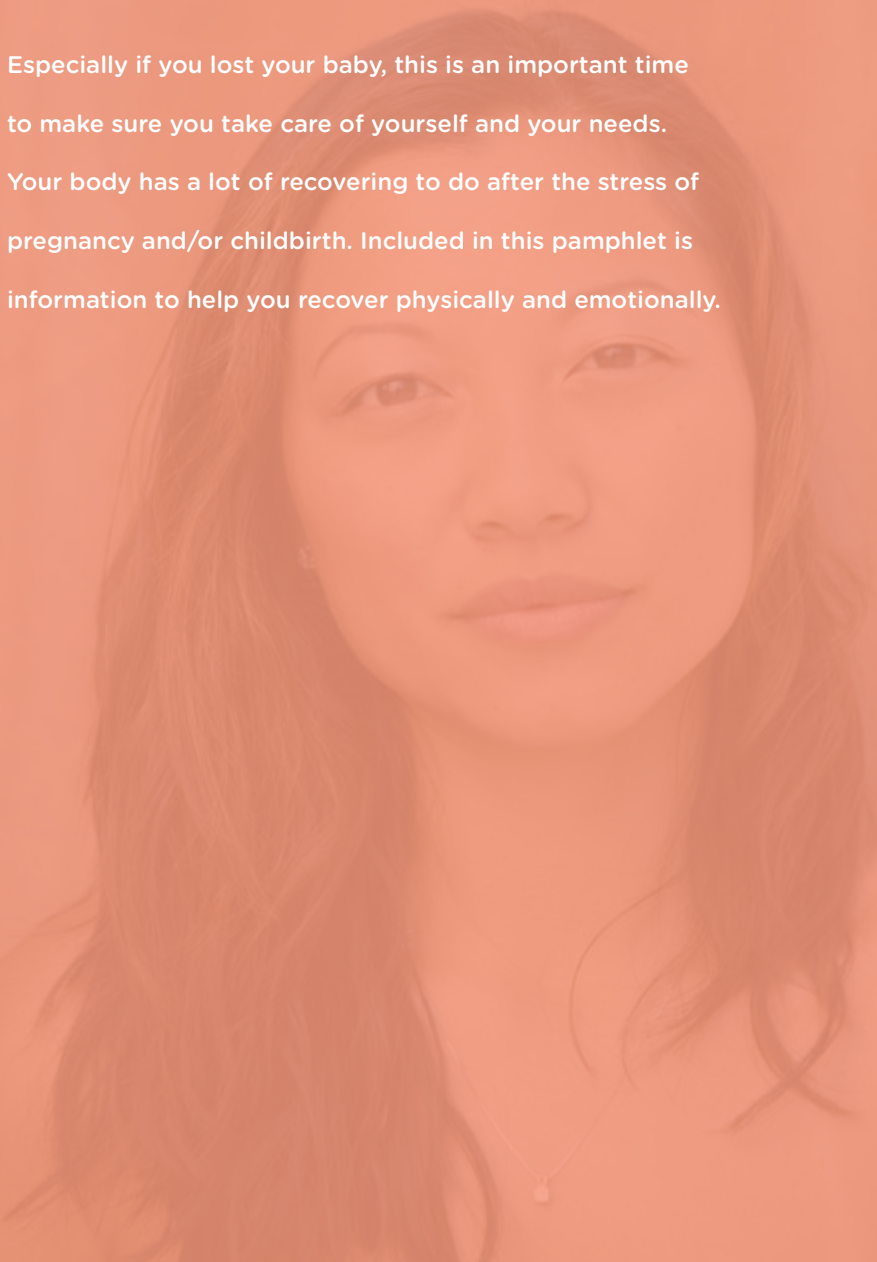
Caring for Yourself  
after Pregnancy Loss



WOMEN, INFANTS & CHILDREN  
Starting healthy habits, growing brighter futures

*Pregnancy and childbirth can take a lot out of you, both mentally and physically.*

Especially if you lost your baby, this is an important time to make sure you take care of yourself and your needs. Your body has a lot of recovering to do after the stress of pregnancy and/or childbirth. Included in this pamphlet is information to help you recover physically and emotionally.



## Taking Care of Yourself

You are going through a very challenging time in your life, and in order to feel better, it is important to address your needs. Below are a few ideas that can help you recover.

**Say yes.** Accept help from friends and family who offer their support. Don't be afraid to ask for help. The people who care about you want to do what they can to make your life easier. Let them know if you need help around the house or running errands.

**Rest.** Sleep patterns are often disrupted when dealing with grief, so rest as often as you need to.

**Eat healthy foods.** Our appetite is often suppressed when we're grieving, but eating foods high in nutrients is important. If eating seems to be too much, try small snacks, smoothies or protein shakes to get nutrition.

**Be active.** When your doctor has cleared you for physical activity and you feel up to it, exercise.

**Seek professional help if you feel you may need it.**

# Nutrition

Supporting a pregnancy takes a toll on your body, regardless of whether or not you were able to carry your baby to term. Proper nutrition is crucial to helping your body repair itself and replenish your nutrient stores.

**WIC provides food with the nutrition your body needs to recover (for up to 6 months).**

- + Protein to repair tissues in your body
- + Iron to keep your blood healthy and oxygen-rich
- + Vitamins and minerals from fruits and vegetables to aid in healing
- + Calcium to keep your bones and teeth healthy and strong



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## RECOMMENDED DAILY SERVINGS

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Vegetables: 5 servings of vegetables a day - 1 serving = 1/2 cup



Fruits: 4 servings of fruit a day - 1 serving = 1/2 cup



Protein: 5 servings of protein a day - 1 serving = 1 ounce



Grains: 6 servings of grains a day - 1 serving = 1 ounce



Dairy: 3 servings of dairy a day - 1 serving = 1 cup

# Lactation

Not every woman who miscarries will have breastmilk come in, but the further along you are in your pregnancy at the time of your loss, the more likely it is you will have some lactation. If you had a stillbirth, late miscarriage, or placed your baby up for adoption, it is very likely your milk will still come in. This can be a difficult reminder of your loss. You can choose to pump and donate your breastmilk for any length of time you choose, or you can take the steps below to suppress milk production.

## To donate your milk:

You may find that donating your milk can be a very important part of the healing process. You may choose to donate to a milk bank or to an informal milk sharing program.

**Milk banks.** Milk banks follow strict criteria, and donors undergo screening questionnaires and mild medical testing. Your donated milk will be given to babies who are in the neonatal intensive care unit (NICU), or babies who are otherwise ill and would greatly benefit from the health benefits of breastmilk. Milk banks that normally set a minimum donation requirement do not require a minimum donation in times of loss.

+ *Mother's Milk Bank - (877) 375-6645*

**Informal milk sharing.** There are community groups that link donors with recipients who accept full responsibility for milk sharing. Screening and testing is not offered or required.

+ *Please visit [nevadabreastfeeds.org](http://nevadabreastfeeds.org) for local breastfeeding resources.*

### **To suppress milk production:**

- + Don't be afraid to relieve your discomfort by expressing some milk. Express just enough to soften your breasts, but not enough to empty them completely. A warm shower will help relieve the discomfort of full breasts, and is a good place to express a little milk to relieve the fullness.
- + How often you express should be determined by your comfort level. Always go as long as you can before pumping (or hand expressing) and take out as little milk as possible. If you have been pumping every 3 hours, start out by pumping every 4 hours, then every 6, then every 8, then every 12, etc. If you have been pumping 6 ounces at each session, pump 4 ounces, then 3, then 2, etc. By gradually expressing less milk less and less often, your supply will decrease without causing you physical discomfort.
- + Using drugs to "dry up" the milk is not recommended because they are not very effective and may cause serious side effects.
- + Wear nursing pads to absorb leaking milk.
- + Drink when you are thirsty. Cutting down on fluids will not reduce your milk supply.
- + Don't bind your breasts. This is an old-fashioned idea which is no longer recommended because it can make you very uncomfortable, and may cause plugged ducts or mastitis. Simply wear a supportive sports bra instead.
- + Use a cold compress or cabbage leaves. Wash and dry the plain green cabbage leaves and place them in your refrigerator. Place cold leaves in your bra and keep in place for 30 minutes. Repeat with new clean, cold leaves.

## Physical Activity

Once your doctor says that it is okay to begin physical activity, take it slow. Being active will help you feel better because physical activity releases endorphins in your body that might help you feel happier. This is often known as a 'runners high.' To start, try going on a short walk (5-10 minutes) with your partner, friend or a loved one. If walking is too much, try marching in place during the commercials while you're watching TV or talking on the phone. Set reasonable goals for yourself; if your 10-minute walk is starting to feel too easy, try going for a longer walk, or walk on an incline.

“Set reasonable goals for yourself.”

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March in place while watching TV or talking on the phone.

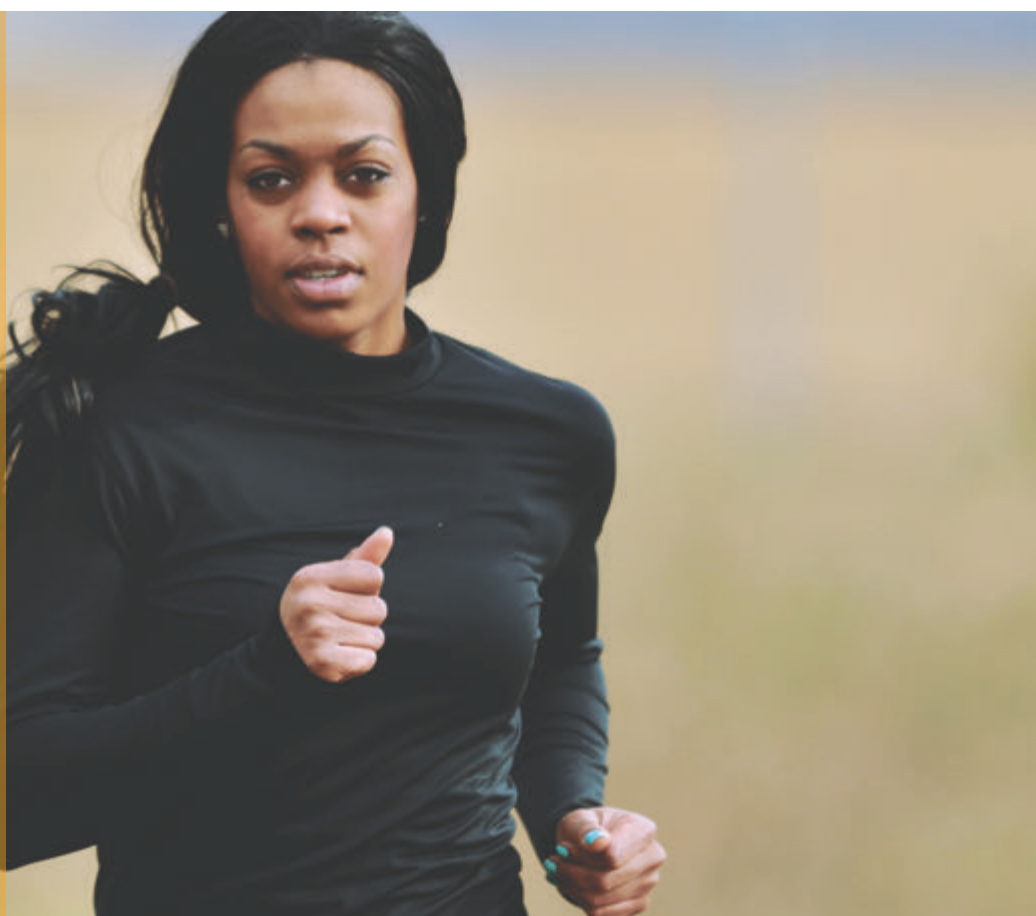


Go for a short walk (5-10 minutes) with a partner, friend or a loved one.



When ready, take a longer walk or walk on an incline.







## Emotional Health

Pregnancy and childbirth can be very emotional times in a woman's life, even more so if a woman experiences a miscarriage, stillbirth or places her baby up for adoption. After delivery, it is common for women to experience the 'baby blues,' which can be due to a variety of factors. One such factor is the huge hormonal shift that occurs in women after delivery. This hormonal shift could make coping with your loss even more of a challenge.

Grief is a perfectly natural human response to significant changes or loss. It can be overwhelming at times, but this is normal and you are not alone if you feel this way. Working through grief is a process; your feelings shift as you process your loss and may include the following, though not necessarily in this order:

***Denial.*** Often, denying your loss or feeling numb is the first reaction to a great loss.

***Anger.*** It is common to feel that your loss is unfair, and this may make you angry at yourself or those around you for not preventing the loss.



***Guilt.*** Blaming yourself for your loss, as if there were something you could have done differently to prevent it, is a common feeling.

***Depression.*** Grieving your loss may make you feel tired, as if you do not have energy to perform daily tasks.

***Loneliness.*** Your grief may make you feel lonely or isolated from others.

***Acceptance.*** As time passes, eventually you will reach a point when you can accept your loss and have hope for the future. Everyone grieves at their own rate and expresses their grief differently. It's common for men and women to react differently. Understand that these differences are normal and don't mean that one parent is experiencing more or less grief, they are just expressing their grief in different ways.

***Frustration.*** Losing a child can make you feel frustrated for many reasons: you may have had difficulty becoming pregnant, undergone many tests and treatments, or you may feel like you have no control over your body.

***Fear or Panic.*** A miscarriage or stillbirth is a sudden and unplanned change in your life and can leave you feeling unable to control other aspects of your life. You may feel as though you've lost your sense of security and worry about the safety of your friends and family, or you may be worried to leave the safety of your home.

A support group is a good resource to aid in the healing process. Interacting with people who have experienced losses similar to yours can help you as you recover. Even if you already have strong social support from friends and family, they might not fully understand what you're going through. Even with the best intentions at heart, people who haven't experienced what you have may make hurtful comments or insensitive suggestions.

# Emotional Health

## When to seek professional help

Grief can be very difficult, and no two people grieve the same way. Grief is a natural process, but sometimes support is needed. Think about the answers to these questions as you consider whether or not to seek help.

*Do you experience an ongoing sense of numbness, or of feeling isolated from others?  
Do you usually feel that you have no one to talk to about what's happened?*

*Are you highly anxious most of the time about your own death or the death of someone you love?*

*Is it beginning to interfere with your relationships, your ability to concentrate, or live as you would like to live?*

*Do you find yourself acting in ways that might prove harmful to you over time: drinking more than you used to; using more prescription or non-prescription drugs; driving in an unsafe or reckless manner (beyond what's normal for you); or entertaining serious thoughts about suicide?*

*Is there some aspect of what you're experiencing that makes you wonder about whether you're normal?*

*Are you always irritable, annoyed, intolerant or angry these days?*

If you answered yes to one or more of these questions, you may benefit from seeking professional support. This support can come from many sources: your physician, a trusted religious leader, or the Crisis Call Center 1 (800) 273-8255. You may also find valuable resources at [Nevada211.org](http://Nevada211.org).





## National Resources

- + **Compassionate Friends**  
*[www.compassionatefriends.org](http://www.compassionatefriends.org)*
- + **First Candle**  
*[www.firstcandle.org/grieving-families](http://www.firstcandle.org/grieving-families)*
- + **MISS Foundation**  
*[www.missfoundation.org](http://www.missfoundation.org)*
- + **March of Dimes**  
*[www.marchofdimes.com/loss-grief.aspx](http://www.marchofdimes.com/loss-grief.aspx)*

**For additional help, please contact the Nevada WIC office at (800) 863-8942.**

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**Women, Infants and Children Program**

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