

What to expect after the loss of your baby

This information sheet aims to answer some commonly asked questions about what to expect after your baby dies. Informed consent and woman centred care are integral to health care in Queensland. Decisions about your care are always up to you.

IMPORTANT: This is general information only. Ask your

We understand this is a very difficult and sad time for you and your family. This information sheet contains important information about this difficult time

What is grief and how long will it last?

Grief is a very common and normal reaction to loss. There is no right or wrong way to feel. Each parent's experience of grief is different and finding the support you need is important.

Strong feelings are very common. Deep sadness, anxiety, fear, anger, guilt, helplessness, and despair are just some of the emotions you might experience. Physical reactions such as tiredness, loss of appetite and difficulty concentrating or remembering things are also very common.

Some parents say that their grief is stronger at some times than others. For many parents, the death of their baby brings a grief that is unexpected, deep, intense, overwhelming, and long lasting.

Allowing yourself the time and space to grieve and finding the support you need from others is important. More information about grief and how to talk to family and friends is also available. Discuss this with your healthcare provider.

Spending time with your baby

You can spend time with your baby. You can decide how long and how often you spend time with your baby. Your healthcare provider will talk to you about this.

The idea of seeing and holding your baby may seem hard or frightening at first. Some parents find this time with their baby creates precious memories. Many parents feel this way but find spending time with their baby is a much cherished experience.

If you are not sure about seeing your baby or are anxious about how your baby may look or feel, your healthcare provider can give you information, support and answer your questions. If you like, they can also be there with you when you see or hold your baby.

If at first you decide not to see your baby, and then change your mind, you can still ask to see your baby. This can happen either at the hospital or before their funeral. Your baby will be cared for on a cool mat and will feel cold to touch. This special mat helps to slow the normal changes that occur after death.

Some parents have found that having time at home with their baby has helped to create special memories. Some have invited family and friends to meet their baby.

To help you decide whether to take your baby home, your healthcare provider can give you more information about:

- looking after your baby's body
- release of your baby from hospital—forms will be completed
- legal requirements for birth and death registration, and burial or cremation
- arranging travel for your baby to your home



How can you create memories?

You can create memories of your baby by:

- holding them
- spending time looking, cuddling, kissing, or singing to them
- making footprints and handprints
- bathing your baby
- dressing your baby in special clothes, or if your baby is very small you may like to wrap them in a special blanket or shawl
- taking photographs and videos of your baby (professional photography may be available)
- saving things that have been important to you during this time (e.g. the original shawl your baby was wrapped in, a lock of hair)—you may like to keep them in a special memory box
- introducing your baby to family and friends
- having a religious, naming, or other ceremony
- having a funeral or other memorial ceremony to say goodbye to your baby

Your healthcare provider can help you to do many of these things and can tell you about other help that is available.

What are hospital mementos?

Your healthcare provider will help you keep special mementos of your baby like the tape measure used to measure your baby, your baby's cot name card and identification bracelet.

If you don't want to see these mementos while you are in the hospital, you may like to take them home, or give them to another family member or friend. You might find you are ready to look at them at a later time.

What will happen with your baby's body?

Your healthcare provider may suggest that your baby has an autopsy. An autopsy is an examination of a body after death. Investigations done during an autopsy can help you understand what happened to your baby and will be discussed with you. An information sheet about autopsy is also available

If your baby was stillborn at 20 weeks or more, and/or weighed 400 grams or more at birth, or died after birth the law in Queensland requires a burial or cremation. Your healthcare provider can give you more information about this.

What will happen with your breastmilk?

"Giving birth naturally encourages your breasts to produce milk. This can be distressing and difficult after the loss of your baby. Suppressing (drying up) your milk will usually cause your milk supply to gradually decrease. Limiting the amount of milk you express, wearing a firm bra, using cold packs, and taking medication for pain if required will help.

Your healthcare provider will give you information and support for reducing your milk production and reducing the risk of breast engorgement (painful, very full breasts), blocked ducts, mastitis. Some women like to donate their breastmilk. Talk to your healthcare provider to discuss if this is an option for you.

Will you get follow-up care?

The usual post birth care after you go home from hospital is available. At your postnatal check (about six weeks after you gave birth) you can discuss any concerns or questions you have. If you need or want to you can see your healthcare provider before this. Your healthcare provider will also discuss physical, emotional and relationship issues that may be experienced following the loss of your baby. This may include options for contraception and planning of future pregnancies. You may be given information about this before you go home from hospital.

Returning to the hospital or clinic where you had antenatal or birthing care may trigger strong emotions. If you don't feel comfortable with returning or wish to see another healthcare provider, ask for different follow-up.

What costs are involved?

Costs vary depending on your choice of funeral director. Some funeral homes offer free or discounted services for stillborn babies. Your funeral director can confirm any costs with you.

Your baby's birth and death must be registered with the Registrar of Births, Deaths, and Marriages. If you would like a birth certificate, you will need to apply and pay for it. The funeral director will usually get the death certificate for you.

Other costs may include a cremation permit, floral tributes, celebrant/minister fee and newspaper notices.

Is there any financial support?

Parents of stillborn babies may be eligible for the maternity allowance, maternity leave, and/or bereavement payment. The forms to claim these may be available at your hospital or you can contact Centrelink for more information. The social worker will be able to help with these.

Talk with your healthcare provider about this.

Support, and information

Your friends, family, doctor, and hospital staff can offer you comfort, support and information at this time.

SANDS (13 000 SANDS or 13 000 72637) provide support and information to parents and families who experience miscarriage, stillbirth, and neonatal and infant death www.sands.org.au

Bears of Hope—Pregnancy & Infant Loss Support (1300 11 HOPE or 1300 11 4673) ongoing comfort, support and counselling to parents and families who have experienced the loss of a baby during pregnancy, birth, and infancy www.bearsofhope.org.au

Heartfelt (1800 583 768) volunteer organisation of professional photographers who provide photographic memories to families. All services are provided free of charge www.heartfelt.org.au

Lifeline (13 11 14) telephone crisis support service www.lifeline.org.au

Red Nose Grief and Loss (1300 308 307) 24-hour bereavement support and counselling to families who have experienced stillbirth or the sudden and unexpected death of a child, regardless of the cause www.rednosegriefandloss.com.au

Centrelink (Family Assistance Office) (13 61 50) provides financial assistance including maternity allowances and bereavement payments www.humanservices.gov.au

Registrar of Births, Deaths, and Marriages (Queensland) (1300 366 430) The registry records and maintains birth and death registrations in Queensland and issues certificates www.qld.gov.au/law/births-deaths-marriages-and-divorces

13HEALTH (13 432584) telephone support providing health information, referral and services www.qld.gov.au/health/contacts/advice/13health

Australian Breastfeeding Association (1800 686 268) comprehensive advice regarding lactation and milk suppression after your baby dies. www.breastfeeding.asn.au/resources/lactation-after-your-baby-dies