



Coping with Grief After Losing a Preterm Baby

This handout gives tips for coping with grief after losing a preterm infant.

After losing a preterm baby, it is common to grieve and feel worried about many things, such as finances, your family, and what to expect in the next few months. Other parents in your situation have found help from the support of loved ones and others who are or have been in your situation. Community and online resources, taking the time to rest, and talking with your health care providers may also be helpful during this time.

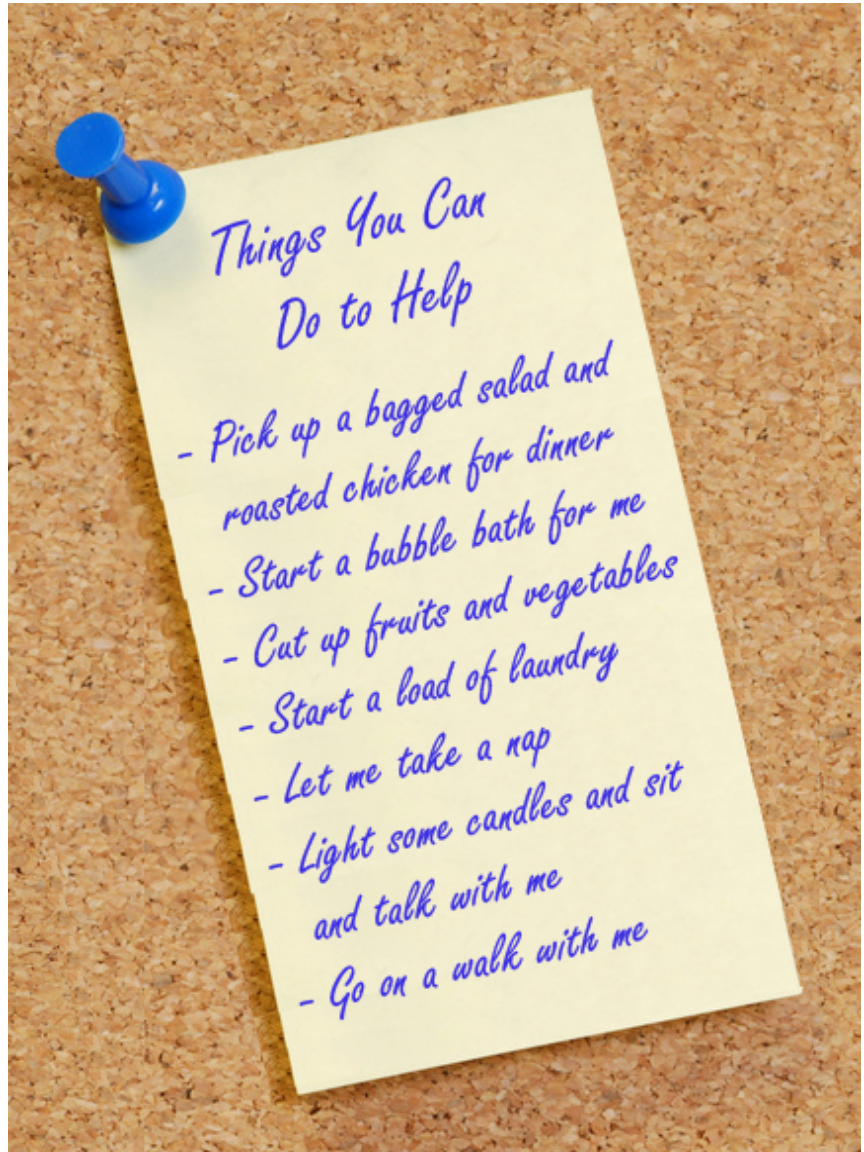
Support Yourself

- Be kind to yourself.
- Get involved by learning about support groups for parents in your area who have also lost a preterm baby. Talk about your stress and connect with others who have had a similar experience.
- Take a time-out. Do deep breathing exercises, take a bubble bath, meditate, count to 10, try yoga exercises, take a walk.
- Talk with a friend, write your thoughts in a journal, laugh when you can.
- Choose healthy ways to cope with your stress and grief. Limit alcohol and caffeine, and avoid smoking and second-hand smoke. Do not turn to substance use to manage your grief.
- Accept that you cannot control everything. Try to let go of what you cannot control, and focus on what you can do to make things better. Take 1 day at a time.
- Eat healthy foods and well-balanced meals to help build up your energy. Continue to take a daily multivitamin with 400 mcg of folic acid (also called *folate*).
- Moving your body may help ease your mind. Short daily walks are better than 1 big exercise period once a week, especially if you are feeling anxious or sad.

UW Medicine

UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON
MEDICAL CENTER

- Accept help. Friends and family really want to help out during this challenging time. Do not try to do everything on your own. Talk with friends and family and ask for their help. Then, make a list of things they can do to help and put it on the refrigerator:



Physical Activity Helps Reduce Stress

- Talk with your provider before starting an exercise program. Usually, you can follow the same exercise guidelines you followed when you were pregnant.
- Walking is a safe way to begin exercising. Build up slowly. If you did not exercise before, you may want to begin by walking 1 block the first day, and then 2 or 3 blocks the next day.

- Slowly increase how often and how fast you walk. Cool down by slowing down at the end of your walk.
- If you had complications, it may take a little while longer to feel ready to start exercising. Also, do not do full sit-ups (crunches) until your doctor says it is OK to do them, probably at your checkup in 6 to 8 weeks.

Feelings

After pregnancy, the hormones in a woman's body quickly change. This sudden change in hormone levels often makes any woman who has just given birth feel overwhelmed, sad, tearful, and stressed.

As many as 8 out of 10 women have these feelings after their pregnancy has ended. These feelings are often called the "baby blues." They are normal and can last up to 2 weeks.

Your feelings of grief and sadness will probably last much longer since you have recently lost a baby.

If you continue to feel overwhelmed or emotionally numb, or you are not eating or sleeping normally, or you just do not seem like your normal self and things seem to be getting worse, talk with your health care provider or counselor. You may have *postpartum mood disorder*, which may make you feel anxious or depressed. This disorder can affect 10 to 20% of women (10 to 20 out of 100) anytime during the first year after pregnancy.

Naturally, you are grieving the death of your baby. Your mourning and healing may last months or years. Some women find that seeking support during this time helps them cope physically and emotionally with what they are going through.

Finding Support

When you have lost a baby, the support and community of others who can relate to what you are going through can be very helpful. Many of the Seattle-area support programs listed below also have groups in other parts of Washington state that may be more convenient for you. Please also check with the UWMC Perinatal or Neonatal Intensive Care Unit social worker, or the social worker at your local hospital, for other resources.

Compassionate Friends

www.compassionatefriends.org or 1-877-969-0010; local chapters throughout Washington and other states

Compassionate Friends is a national organization with local chapters. It provides support to families grieving the death of a child, including newborns. They offer online and in-person peer support, support for siblings and grandparents, and online reading materials.

Questions?

Your questions are important. Call your doctor or health care provider if you have questions or concerns. UWMC clinic staff are also available to help.

Maternal and Infant
Care Clinic:
206-598-4070

Grief Watch

www.griefwatch.com

The Grief Watch website provides bereavement resources, memorial products, and links to many other websites that may help you cope with your loss.

Journey Program, Seattle Children's Hospital

www.seattlechildrens.org/clinics-programs/grief-and-loss or
206-987-2062; Seattle area only

The Journey Program offers support groups for adults who have lost a child at any age, including newborns lost to complications from premature birth. The groups are led by trained and caring staff at Seattle Children's Hospital. There is a fee for these groups. Individual and family counseling, family support, reading materials, and referrals to interfaith and faith-based community resources are all available through this program.

March of Dimes

www.marchofdimes.com/pnhec/572.asp (English)
www.nacersano.org/prematuro/9324.asp (Spanish)

March of Dimes is a national organization with local chapters. It provides information, articles, and support for families on many topics related to birth, including information and support for families who have lost a baby. On this topic, the March of Dimes provides information on how to cope when your baby dies and how to care for yourself. They also have a list of national faith-based and secular resources to support families who are dealing with the loss of a baby.

Parent Support of Puget Sound

www.psofpugetsound.org or 206-782-0054; Seattle Children's Hospital, Overlake Hospital, and other locations in Washington state

Parent Support is led by group members. It is a group of parents who have formed a support group for anyone who has lost a child through stillbirth, miscarriage, or newborn death. Their mission is to reach out to those who have had such a loss and provide support. They offer monthly group meetings at no cost in various communities across Washington. Through this program, you will find a network of parents you can speak with who have suffered a similar loss. You will also have access to referrals, a lending library, and a bi-monthly newsletter.

Some of the information in this handout was adapted from:

"Getting in Shape After Your Baby Is Born" by the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists

"Tips to Manage Anxiety and Stress" by Anxiety Disorders Association of America

UW Medicine

UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON
MEDICAL CENTER

Maternal and Infant Care Clinic
Box 356159
1959 N.E. Pacific St. Seattle, WA 98195
206-598-4070