

Neonatal death - information and support

What does neonatal death mean?

If a baby dies within the first 28 days after they're born, it is known as a neonatal death.

Why do babies die?

After the loss of a baby, it is natural to want answers about why it happened.

Sometimes the answer is clear, and other times a doctor or coroner will need to run tests or do a post-mortem to find out what happened and why.

Sometimes they may not be able to find out why.

Support after your baby dies

The loss of a baby is devastating. As well as managing your emotions in the early days and weeks after loss, you will have decisions and arrangements to make. It is an overwhelming time,

We can't pretend to know how you're feeling because grief after losing a baby is different for everyone.

Frighteningly intense grief

It can feel like it is affecting you physically as well as emotionally. Parents have told us the intensity of feelings can be frightening.

These feelings might make you think you are losing control of your mind, but however strong your feelings may be, it is not abnormal.

Grief can feel like it's taking over everything

The physical symptoms of grief

Some people experience grief physically as well as emotionally. Symptoms could include shaking, an upset stomach, heart palpitations, and pain in your chest, butterflies in your stomach and sickness, all of which are common.

Try to look after yourself and your body after your baby dies. It's normal not to have an appetite but you need to keep eating and drinking, and try to keep as physically strong as you can because it will help you cope with the emotional trauma you're going through.

Exhaustion and being run-down physically and emotionally can make you more prone to viral infections, like colds.

It's not uncommon to find it difficult to sleep and to experience dreams and nightmares for a while.

If you are worried about any physical symptoms, speak to your GP and see if they can help. Not getting something checked out can make you feel more anxious.

Feeling numb

The early hours, days or even weeks after your baby dies often feel like a blur. You might find yourself numb and removed from the world and what is happening around you.

Common feelings

Every parent will react to the loss of their baby differently. You might feel numb, shocked, angry, sad or a combination of things. Here are some common feelings bereaved parents describe to us:

Guilt

When a baby dies, most parents blame themselves for what happened or think deep down they have failed their baby. In almost all deaths this is not the case but it is a powerful emotion. Even if you know rationally that you could not have prevented the death, you may blame yourself and be angry with yourself for not being able to stop it.

Anger

It's normal to feel angry; it is a natural part of grief. You might feel angry at the hospital, parents of healthy babies, or others who don't understand what you're going through, including friends or family.

It will feel incredibly unfair that this has happened to you, especially if it is an early neonatal death and you have been very careful in pregnancy to do everything that is recommended to keep your baby healthy.

You might find it helpful to talk to other parents who have lost a baby for reassurance that what you're feeling is normal, and help you to feel less alone.

If your instinct is to talk, you may find yourself sharing your story over and over. This is OK. Every time you say your baby's name or share their story, it will help you come to terms with what has happened.

This isn't for everyone. Some parents find it hard to describe how they're feeling or talk about their baby. In this case, try writing down what happened and fill in a diary of how you feel each day. You can keep this private or share it with your partner or anyone else who you want to understand what you're going through.