

# If your baby has died or you need to say goodbye

Information and advice for parents



## **If your baby has died or you need to say goodbye.....**

This is a deeply distressing time for you and this booklet provides some useful information you may require over the coming days and weeks.

Please don't hesitate to ask any questions, no matter how simple the question may seem. Staff will try to answer your questions as best as they can and to give you the time and space required to grieve for your baby.

### **First few hours and days:**

Initially you will be in shock and events may seem unreal and difficult to understand. Decisions you will be asked to make will seem impossible. However, please take time and discuss everything with the midwife, nurse or doctor caring for you. If no one is available to support you at this time, we will suggest that you call a partner, friend or relative.

You may find it useful to write down questions in advance of discussions with the midwife, nurse or doctor.

### **How will your baby be born?**

You will be given the opportunity to discuss with a senior doctor how your baby will be born. Normally we recommend that your labour is induced and you give birth as normal, unless there are medical reasons for a caesarean section. This is because it is generally safer for you and lowers the risk of problems in future pregnancies. Unless there are medical reasons for an immediate caesarean section we can arrange this for a time when you are ready.

The thought of going through labour and giving birth to your baby may be overwhelming but in many situations this often helps towards coming to terms with your loss as it can create a very special memory for the future.

## **Physical symptoms to expect after your baby is born**

You should expect some bleeding which may initially be heavy but should settle to be 'period like' within the first couple of days. It varies how long different women bleed for but if you are concerned, bleeding becomes heavy, you are passing clots or it has an offensive smell, please contact the Labour Ward on 01270 612146 for advice.

Commonly breast milk can be produced causing your breasts to feel heavy and possibly leak. This can be distressing but we can discuss this with you and give you tablets to help with this.

Following vaginal birth there may be some trauma around the vagina, which may require stitches. Your midwife will advise you about pain relief and perineal care.

It will take a few weeks for your body to return to normal. However, if you have any worries, questions or queries you can contact your GP, Community Midwife or Labour Ward.



## **Grieving**

Grieving is an individual emotion, no two people necessarily grieve in the same way and the staff caring for you understand this. However you respond at this time it can be important to create memories of your baby.

### **Suggestions which may help you:**

#### **Holding and seeing your baby**

This may be a difficult decision for you. Many parents may feel anxious about seeing their baby and others may be more comfortable with this. Again everyone is different and it is important that you do not feel pressurised to make an immediate decision. Staff are available to help and describe to you what your baby looks like.

Once you have been discharged from hospital and you would like to see your baby, please do not hesitate to contact the Labour Ward on 01270 612146 or the Bereavement Team on 01270 273882. A time will then be agreed for you to attend Leighton Hospital.

#### **Dressing your baby**

If you feel it appropriate you can bathe and dress your baby. If you would like to, you can bring in clothes. You can also bring in a toy, or other special objects (perhaps a letter, family photos, drawings from siblings etc.) which will stay with the baby and be placed in the coffin.

#### **For the father**

As the father of the baby you may feel that you are there to support everyone else, however you too need time to grieve. Please don't hesitate to ask for support. You can contact your GP or one of the support groups listed at the end of this booklet.

## **Your relationship with your partner**

When you are both grieving, it may be difficult to provide that mutual support for each other; this is normal.

It is important that both of you seek support from your GP, a counsellor, SANDS, or any of the organisations highlighted at the end of this booklet.

## **Other children**

If you have other children you may feel at a loss as to how to explain what has happened. They may ask very direct questions and it is important that you are prepared for this. It is also important that your other child/children know that it is okay to be sad. Use language that is honest and easy to understand (e.g. try not to say that the baby was born asleep as they will want to know why they are not waking up, or say we've lost the baby as they may wonder why you don't go and find the baby).

Gifts for your baby to go into the coffin can be very important if you have children of any age. It can help them to say goodbye and deal with their feelings of loss at this difficult time.

## **Family and friends**

Family, friends and others may find it difficult to know what to say or do. It is important that you are open and honest, advising if you wish to talk about the death of your baby or not. Others may offer to help with every day chores, again it is important to accept their help if you would find this useful. Likewise, it is important to acknowledge that you would find it helpful if you did the chores yourself.

## **Photographs**

You may wish to create your own memories by taking photographs with your own camera/video. A professional photographer may also be available free of charge should you wish to use this service. The member of staff caring for you will be able to arrange this.

If you do not wish to take your own photographs, the staff caring for you will offer to take some photographs of your baby for you depending on the age of your baby. The photographs will be printed and given to you, or stored securely in your maternity notes therefore being available for you at a later date.

## **Creating memories**

Creating a memory box is a very important part of the grieving process and a very important keepsake.

If you would like to create a memory box, they are available for you and staff will help you do this. Suggestions for the memory box:

- Your baby's hand and foot prints
- A lock of hair
- Baby's name tags
- The weight and length of your baby.

Looking at these keepsakes in the early days of grieving may be difficult, but in time they can bring comfort.



## **Spiritual care**

Whether or not you are a member of a faith group or religion, support is available for you through the Hospital's Chaplains. The Chaplains are available to support you in your loss, to pray with you and/or to conduct a short service of naming and blessing if required.

To speak to a Chaplain, either ask a member of staff to contact them or alternatively if you have been discharged, please phone Leighton Hospital switchboard on 01270 255141 and ask them to bleep the on-call Chaplain.

## **Bereavement Service**

The Bereavement Team ensures families receive a high standard of care following the death of their loved one. The Bereavement Team works closely with ward staff, doctors, chaplaincy service and other health and social care professionals to support and complement the work they do.

The Bereavement Team are available Monday to Friday 8.30am - 4.30pm (excluding Bank Holidays), and can be contacted on 01270 273882 within normal working hours. If you need any advice or help outside of normal working hours, please speak to a member of staff on the Labour Ward who will assist you, alternatively you can leave a message on the Bereavement Team's telephone answer machine.



## **Bereavement advice/support**

Following the loss of your baby, the emotional and physical reactions can be intense and you may be surprised by the reactions that follow. These can be unfamiliar and out of character.

Some of the most common feelings are: shock and disbelief, loss, guilt, regret, injustice, envy, anger, depression, sleep deprivation, loss/increase in appetite, exhaustion, restlessness, anxiety, panic, loss of interest, tearfulness, irritability, and inability to cope. It is important that you give yourself time and space to deal with difficult emotions.

Further advice or support can be given by contacting the Labour Ward on 01270 612144 or your Community Midwife.

There is also a wide range of organisations which offer support to bereaved families. Please see useful contacts list at the end of this booklet.

## **Post mortem examination/investigations**

A post mortem is like an operation that can be performed on your baby that may give answers as to why your baby died. This information may help when planning future pregnancies. This can be a full post mortem of all of your baby's body or just part of it. As this requires careful consideration an information booklet will be provided and a doctor will discuss this with you.

It is important for you to know that no investigation on you or your baby will take place without your consent. There may be instances where the death of your baby has to be referred to the Coroner and he/she may order a post mortem examination to determine the exact cause of death. If the Coroner orders a post mortem examination it becomes a legal obligation, therefore permission from relatives/next of kin is not required. You will be advised if this happens.



## **Going home**

Leaving hospital without your baby is difficult and distressing, staff will support you as much as they can. Your baby will be well cared for and treated with respect and compassion by all hospital staff. Your midwife and GP will be informed that you have gone home. Visits by your midwife can be arranged and it is useful to book an appointment to have a check-up with your GP about 6-8 weeks after you have delivered.

You will be offered a follow-up appointment at the hospital to discuss any test results and/or post mortem results to help you plan for future pregnancies and to discuss any questions you may have.

This is usually three months after you have delivered to ensure that we have as many of your results available as possible.

## **Taking your baby home before the funeral**

An option you may not have considered is whether to take your baby home for a short time before the funeral. Some parents like to take their baby home and spend time with him or her either on their own or with family and friends around them. If you want to take your baby home, please ask a member of staff for advice.



## **Registration**

### **Baby born before 24 weeks gestation**

A baby born before 24 weeks, showing no signs of life, does not need to be registered.

Babies born before 24 weeks **but do** show signs of life for a short time, will be referred to the Coroner and pending his/her decision baby's birth and death needs to be registered.

### **Stillbirth**

Following a stillbirth (a baby born from 24 weeks onwards, showing no signs of life). The parents will be given a Stillbirth Certificate by the Labour Ward which they need to take to the registrar to formally register the death of the baby. Registration needs to be soon after the death as possible unless the Coroner decides that a post mortem is necessary.

### **Neonatal death**

(A baby is born alive at any gestation but dies within four weeks of birth)

Following a neonatal death the Coroner will be informed and he/she will decide if the Medical Certificate of Cause of Death can be issued immediately or a post mortem is required.

If a Medical Certificate of Cause of Death is issued, you are required to make an appointment to register the death. An appointment can be made by contacting the Bereavement Team on 01270 273882. It is generally expected that registration takes place within five working days. If the Coroner decides a post mortem is required he/she will issue all the relevant paperwork after the post mortem has taken place and advise you of how to progress.



## **Funeral arrangements**

Making funeral arrangements can be upsetting and confusing and add to an already stressful time. You may feel overwhelmed by the decisions you have to make and ill-prepared to make them. The funeral is the last thing you will do for your baby, so give yourself time to decide what the right decision is for you.

Firstly you have to decide on either a cremation or burial. You may choose to organise this independently or the hospital can help you with this.

### **Making your own funeral arrangements**

If you decide to make the funeral arrangements yourself you will first need to select a Funeral Director of your choice, they will help and advise you regarding your options and explain what is available locally.

### **Hospital funeral arrangements**

The hospital can arrange with a Funeral Director a basic funeral on your behalf. This can either be a burial or cremation. We will provide you with the details of the Funeral Director and options available. If you choose cremation, there may only be minimal ashes (but usually there are no ashes) you will have the option of having these returned to you or they can be scattered in the Petal Garden at Crewe Cemetery by crematorium staff.

The option of a service at Crewe Crematorium is available but there will be a fee which you would be liable to pay, this is a charge stipulated by the Crematorium and not the hospital. This can be discussed with either the Bereavement Team or staff on the Labour Ward.

## **Maternity and paternity rights**

You may be entitled to full maternity/paternity rights:

- If your baby is registered as stillborn
- If your baby is registered as a birth then a death
- Following a Neonatal death (regardless of how long baby lived).

## **Refer to local HM Revenue and Customs Guidance**

If your baby was born before 24 weeks and wasn't born alive, you will need to see your GP as soon as you are able to, to obtain a fit note for as long as you feel necessary and this can be reviewed as and when needed.

## **Going back to work**

If you are in employment it can be very difficult to decide the 'right' time return to work. If your baby was registered, you are entitled to full maternity pay and maternity leave.

## **Getting back to work – suggestions:**

- Call into work for a short time to see your manager/colleagues
- Work reduced hours – phased return to work
- Be aware of your emotions and accept that it is OK.

## **Stopping baby-related post**

Prior to the birth of your baby you may have subscribed to a number of baby related services who may send you information related to babies over the coming weeks and months.

Please contact Mailing Preference Service (MPS) for further information. This is a free service. Alternatively we can complete the leaflet with you as these are available on the Labour Ward.

## **Ways to remember your baby**

- A memory box
- Having your baby's name written in the Book of Remembrance which is kept in the hospital chapel and can be viewed at any time. The book is taken each year to our annual memorial service
- Memorials – for example, planting a tree, special bench, plaque etc. in your garden
- Finding a special place where you can reflect
- Naming a star
- Special decorations at Christmas
- Having a specific piece of jewellery
- Making a donation/fundraising for a charity
- Attending Leighton Hospital's Baby Memorial Service – an invitation to the service will be sent to you nearer the time
- Lighting a candle or releasing a balloon on anniversaries.



## **The future**



Once all investigations have taken place and results are available (some of which could take three to four months), you will be offered an appointment to see your Consultant Obstetrician or Paediatrician and plans can be made should you wish to have another baby.

## **Further support**

Recognising that your feelings and emotions will be changeable for some time it is important to seek support either from family, your GP and/or other professionals.

## **Future pregnancy**

If you become pregnant again, it is important to know that this can be a time of very mixed emotions. Please contact your midwife as soon possible, as they can offer support and/or refer you to specialist organisations.

## **Useful contacts**

Bereavement Team, Leighton Hospital  
Direct Line: 01270 273882

Community Midwives  
Direct Line: 01270 612177/612141

Labour Ward, Leighton Hospital  
Direct Line: 01270 612144

ARC - Antenatal Results and Choices  
[www.arc-uk.org](http://www.arc-uk.org)  
Tel: 0845 077 2290  
or if calling from mobile telephone 020 7713 7486  
Email: [info@arc-uk.org](mailto:info@arc-uk.org)

Bliss - The Special Care Baby Charity  
[www.bliss.org.uk](http://www.bliss.org.uk)  
Tel: 020 7378 1122  
Email: [hello@bliss.org.uk](mailto:hello@bliss.org.uk)

CBC - The Child Bereavement Charity  
[www.childbereavement.org.uk](http://www.childbereavement.org.uk)  
Tel: 01494 568900  
Email: [support@childbereavementuk.org](mailto:support@childbereavementuk.org)

Miscarriage Association  
[www.miscarriageassociation.org.uk](http://www.miscarriageassociation.org.uk)  
Tel: 01924 200799  
Email: [info@miscarriageassociation.org.uk](mailto:info@miscarriageassociation.org.uk)

Sands Stillbirth and Neonatal Death Charity  
[www.sands.org.uk](http://www.sands.org.uk)  
Tel: 0808 164 3332  
Email: [helpline@uk.sands.org](mailto:helpline@uk.sands.org)



Saying Goodbye  
[www.sayinggoodbye.org](http://www.sayinggoodbye.org)  
Tel: 0845 293 8027  
Email: [support@sayinggoodbye.org](mailto:support@sayinggoodbye.org)

TAMBA Bereavement Support Group  
[www.tamba.org.uk/bsg](http://www.tamba.org.uk/bsg)  
Tel: 0800 138 0509

Winston's Wish  
[www.winstonswish.org.uk](http://www.winstonswish.org.uk)  
Tel: 08088 020 021

## Notes

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**This information is available in audio, Braille, large print and other languages. To request a copy, please ask your midwife.**

Revised and reprinted February 2021  
Review February 2023  
Ref: WC/MS/0331220

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