



Making Arrangements After Pregnancy Loss

(Over 20 weeks gestation, non-surgical loss)



Please accept our sincere condolences on the loss of your pregnancy. We hope the following information is helpful to you as you make decisions in the days ahead.

A loss at any time during a pregnancy can be devastating. You and your family may be overwhelmed by many powerful emotions. We know families vary widely in how they experience pregnancy loss. For some it is the death of a son or daughter and the loss of a future. For others, it may solely be the loss of a pregnancy. There is no one right or single path loving families take. How this loss is experienced may affect certain decisions you make including:

- **Seeing and holding your baby:** If you have a vaginal or cesarean delivery, you may choose to see and hold your baby. For many, this contact helps them grieve their loss. You may also choose to have photographs taken, footprints made, or engage in other memory making at that time. Some families find the use of a Cuddle Cot cooling bed helpful to keep the baby in the hospital room. You may talk with your nurse about this option. If you decide not to see your baby, and/or do not view this as the loss of a baby, we are also here to support you and understand you are making the best decisions for yourself during this difficult time.
- **Naming your baby:** While some parents desire to name their baby, and are comfortable doing so, others are not. It is a personal choice.
- **Spiritual and religious support and rituals:** If you would like specific rituals performed such as a blessing, a naming, or a baptism ceremony, ask to speak with a hospital chaplain. You may also ask staff to help you contact your own spiritual leader. We want to support all possible opportunities for desired spiritual or religious ceremonies.

- **Burial or Cremation:** You may choose to be involved in this process and make private arrangements for cremation or burial, or you may ask the hospital team to make arrangements on your behalf.

We understand you may feel overwhelmed making so many difficult decisions at once. Our medical providers and social work staff are available to help answer your questions. While we need to follow hospital and legal procedures, it is important to us to support the choices that feel the best and most right for you.

Making decisions about what to do next is an opportunity to acknowledge your loss in a way that will be meaningful to you and help you begin to grieve. We do not expect that you will immediately know what to do regarding all of these decisions. It may take time to decide. Our team wants to support you and will be available to address your needs and concerns.

Commonly asked questions

Please be sure to talk with your medical provider, nurse or social worker about any questions or worries you may have. Here are some questions families ask most often.

Will there be a fetal examination (autopsy)?

You may choose whether or not to have a fetal examination. It may be several weeks before the results become available, but the examination is usually completed within a few days. Once the results are available, your medical provider or genetic counselor will contact you to review the examination results and answer your questions. Often results from an examination can help answer questions about what caused or contributed to the loss, but this cannot be guaranteed. Fetal examinations are billed to your insurance provider. If the examination is not fully covered by your insurance, pathology will wave these fees when requested. Arrangements, such as burial or cremation, can proceed once the physical examination portion of the autopsy is complete.

Note: there are some genetic tests **separate from the fetal examination/autopsy** that may be offered and **do have a cost** to the family. These costs can be significant and are **often not covered by insurance**. Be sure you **understand what your financial responsibility will be** for these tests before you request to have them completed.

What are my choices for arranging burial or cremation?

You and your family may choose one of the following options:

1. You may make private arrangements and work directly with a funeral home of your choosing to plan for a cremation or burial based on your personal beliefs and wishes. Our social work staff can help you with this process and may also be able to help you find financial resources to help with these expenses if needed. Please note: It may take up to **3 days** before your baby is ready to transfer into the care of the funeral home.
2. If you do not wish to make private arrangements for cremation or burial, as above, you may ask the hospital to make arrangements on your behalf at no charge. With this decision, your baby will be buried in an individual grave within the C.S. Mott Children's and Von Voigtlander Women's Hospital Memorial Garden at Arborcrest Cemetery (2521 Glazier Way Ann Arbor, MI 48105). You may decide whether or not you would like to be present at the time of the simple burial. Loving families make either decision. Families can visit the Memorial Garden whenever they would like. At a later time, shortly after the burial or even years later, families may choose to purchase a memorial plaque for the burial site. This would need to be arranged directly with Arborcrest staff.

What if I choose to have a burial?

You and your family, with the help of a local funeral director, may purchase a plot. Some cemeteries have a special area for infant and pregnancy loss. You will need to plan for the cost of:

- A plot
- A casket

- A headstone (if desired)
- Professional fees for having the cemetery plot opened and closed

These costs may vary based on the cemetery and your baby's gestational age. Many funeral homes and cemeteries offer reduced cost services to families who have experienced the loss of a pregnancy or infant. Our social workers can assist you in looking for financial resources if needed.

What if I choose cremation?

If you choose cremation, take time to decide what feels most right to you in planning for your baby's ashes (cremains). The amount of ashes you will receive will likely be quite small. You may work with your local funeral home for guidance about available options for the ashes and what the costs will be. Some people prefer to sprinkle or bury their baby's ashes in a special place, while others desire to keep the ashes in a small urn or special container. Parents have also had ashes placed into jewelry. As with burial, many funeral homes and crematories offer cremation at a reduced cost to families who have experienced the loss of a pregnancy or infant and can provide guidance on arrangements for the ashes.

What are my choices regarding planning a memorial service or a funeral?

Holding a funeral service or memorial on the day of burial or after cremation may be a way to honor your baby and help your family grieve and heal. Services may take place at a funeral home, a local church, synagogue or house of worship, a cemetery, or in any place of importance to you. Some families have shared they honored their baby during a service by:

- Sharing ultrasound pictures or photographs of their baby
- Reading a poem or playing music
- Having a tree-planting ceremony in their backyard
- Donating financial gifts to an important organization or program in their baby's or family's name

Many families are not ready to have a service after the loss and will wait months or even years to hold a memorial, if at all. There is no set timeline for when memorials must take place. Do what feels most right for you.

I don't have a funeral home in mind. How do I choose one?

Many of our patients turn to family and loved ones for suggestions on a funeral home or crematory. Others look for funeral homes online or consider funeral homes near their home. Our social workers are also available to help you identify a funeral home.

What if I need help paying for arrangements?

Many funeral homes provide low cost services for families who have experienced the loss of a pregnancy or infant. When you contact a funeral home or a crematory, ask them about costs up front. If you have financial concerns about making arrangements, please ask to speak with a social worker.

What if I don't know what I want to do now or want to think about it after I get home?

You will be asked to complete paperwork expressing your wishes for arrangements for your baby before leaving the hospital; however, you may mark undecided if you need more time to consider arrangements. There is an option to call the Children's and Women's Bereavement Program-Office of Decedent Affairs (ODA) at 734-615-3122 within 2 weeks of your discharge from the hospital to share your decision, or you can have the funeral home contact the hospital directly. **If our staff does not hear from you within the 2-week period**, arrangements will be made on your behalf as per Michigan Medicine protocol and remains will not be able to be returned to you.

May I donate my baby or their organs for research to help other families?

If your pregnancy was greater than 32 weeks gestation, Gift of Life may review information to determine eligibility for donation. At this time, there are no options at Michigan Medicine for other donation.

Who will help me if I want to perform religious or cultural rites while in the hospital?

Our healthcare team and the Spiritual Care Department are available to assist with cultural or religious rites or rituals that are meaningful to you and your family. Please ask your nurse or social worker to contact a chaplain for additional support or let a member of our team know how we can assist you in contacting your own spiritual leader.

Do we receive a Certificate of Stillbirth from the hospital?

Michigan Medicine does not provide copies of Certificates of Stillbirth. A nurse or hospital chaplain can provide your family with a Certificate of Remembrance if desired. You may obtain a copy of a Certificate of Stillbirth from the State of Michigan's Department of Vital Records. Information can be found at:

http://www.michigan.gov/mdch/0,4612,7-132-4645_4702---,00.html. If you chose cremation, your chosen funeral home will provide you with a certificate of cremation.

Who do I call if I have more questions?

- For questions about care coordination for final arrangements, call the Women's and Children's Bereavement Program-Office of Decedent Affairs: (734) 615-3122.
- For questions about pregnancy loss support resources and counseling referrals, call Michigan Medicine ObGyn Social Workers: (734) 232-8956
- For questions about spiritual support and resources, call Michigan Medicine Office of Spiritual Care: (734) 936-4041

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