



Although having a miscarriage can be **devastating,**  
**don't give up hope.** The odds are in your favor...  
you will

**CONCEIVE**

**A**fter 4 years of marriage, Erika and Colin Blaney decided they wanted to share their life with a child. They were young, successful and in love. A baby seemed like the logical next step in their relationship.

At first, it seemed as though nature agreed with them. In October 2001, a home pregnancy test announced that Erika was pregnant. "It happened the first month we tried," she says. "It was a great surprise."

The couple decided to keep the pregnancy a secret until Christmas, when their families were expected to gather in their San Carlos, CA, home. Then, just as quickly as the pregnancy happened, it was gone.

"It was December 23, and we were preparing to host Christmas dinner," Erika

"Approximately 90% of women who suffer miscarriages go on to have healthy, full-term babies," says Lisa King, a reproductive endocrinologist on staff at Methodist Health System in Dallas.

Even women who suffer recurrent miscarriages are likely to have a healthy pregnancy. "Women who have suffered three miscarriages in a row and then do nothing always have a 50% chance that everything will be fine with the next pregnancy," says Randy Morris, a reproductive endocrinologist in the Chicago area.

Most miscarriages occur during the first trimester. "Women need to understand this is very common, and the vast majority occur due to chromosomal abnormalities," says Fady Sharara, medical director at the Virginia Center for Reproductive Medicine.

produces hGC," says Morris. The level of hGC — or human chorionic gonadotropin — increases during the pregnancy. "After a pregnancy is lost, it takes time for these levels to come down to normal," Morris continues, adding that the body is fully recovered once the levels, as measured by a doctor, are negative. "We like to see the reproductive system back to where it was before the [miscarried] pregnancy," Morris says. Sometimes, but not always, this is signaled by the return of a woman's period, depending on the amount of bleeding she had during her miscarriage.

King advises her patients to wait a bit longer. "I usually say to wait until three menstrual cycles," she says. "I like to assure the organization of the endometrium after a miscarriage. There may be irregular spotting and bleeding during the first cycle, which may not be healthy. A patient needs to be healthy to implant an embryo." She also says that allowing time for three periods enables women and their doctors to more accurately determine the date of conception for a subsequent pregnancy.

The speed of recovery also depends on how advanced the pregnancy was before the miscarriage occurred. "An earlier miscarriage means quicker recovery," says Sharara. Choosing to have a D&C (a surgical procedure in which any placental, embryonic or endometrial tissue left in the uterus is removed) done following a miscarriage may also quicken the body's return to normal levels. >>

# AGAIN

By Mary Dixon Lebeau

recalls. "We went in for our 8-week ultrasound. I was excited, thinking we'd be seeing the first picture of our baby."

Instead, the Blaneys were told the fetus had no heartbeat. "I didn't quite believe it," Erika says. "I was sure I was pregnant. I felt the part. I decided to wait for the miscarriage as opposed to having a D&C [dilatation and curettage]. I eventually miscarried at 11 weeks."

Blaney says she felt "sad but philosophical" about losing the pregnancy. "I thought we would just start trying again. It happened easily the first time, so I expected it to be the same way the second time around."

## The Good News

The statistics concerning miscarriage vary. Many first-trimester miscarriages are not reported. Some occur so early on that the woman doesn't realize she's losing a pregnancy and just believes her period has arrived late. But in every instance, the stats concerning miscarriage are reassuring for couples hoping to conceive after they've had one.

Of course, nature and numbers don't tell the whole story. Behind each statistic is a person, a story. After losing a pregnancy, when is a woman truly ready to try again?

## Let's Get Physical

The answer to that question is both simple and complex. "A woman can try to conceive again as soon as she's ready, and I encourage her to do so," says Fred Licciardi, a fertility specialist and associate professor of reproductive endocrinology at New York University. "Most want to try as soon as possible."

But a woman needs to make sure she's ready physically, mentally and emotionally for pregnancy following a loss. Although experts agree it's generally safe for a woman to start trying again a month after her miscarriage (or upon the completion of one menstrual cycle), there may be reasons to wait longer than that. To understand why, you need to know a bit about what goes on in the body during a pregnancy.

"When a woman is pregnant, she





## Emotional Rescue

The physical recovery from a miscarriage, however, is just one part of the healing process — and it's the easy part. A miscarriage is a loss that needs to be grieved.

"Emotions can run the gamut," says Morris. "Some women seem to have no emotion, while others seek therapy." It's important to grieve in whatever way feels right for you.

"The wisest advice I received came from my midwife, who told me not to fight my emotions," says Ann Douglas, co-author of *Trying Again: A Guide to Pregnancy After Miscarriage, Stillbirth and Infant Loss*. "If I was grieving the baby who had died, that was okay. If I was feeling scared that something may happen to this baby, that was okay.... She gave me the courage to embark on that 9-month-long roller coaster ride that is a subsequent pregnancy."

"Women are often looking for answers following a miscarriage," says Licciardi. "There is no blame. Some women need to be consoled, while others may need treatment for their depression."

"Mom needs to take care of herself first," says Morris. "Some women may become depressed. But there are depression medications that can be taken during pregnancy."

Experts acknowledge that fathers may also need time to grieve before trying to conceive again. "It's important for a woman and her partner to be in sync when it comes to the question of timing," Douglas says. "Both partners need a chance to grieve and recover emotionally from the miscarriage or stillbirth."

## Getting Ready

Once you're physically and emotionally prepared for another pregnancy, where do you start? King suggests using the time between pregnancies to get the body ready for the adventure ahead. "I tell my patients to start taking prenatal vitamins and folic acid," she says. "It's also a good time to give up bad habits, such as smoking or drinking."

These are some other positive steps a potential mom-to-be can take:

- Exercise regularly
- Eat a healthy diet
- Reduce caffeine intake
- Manage weight gain or loss
- Avoid stress or stressful situations (easier said than done!)

## Snake Oil Salesmen

Miscarriage is an emotional subject, and many questions about the loss will remain unanswered. Unfortunately, there are people who take advantage of those going through this loss. "Beware the snake oil salesmen. They're out there in droves," Morris says.

He notes that there are various products or methods being sold to vulnerable parents as "cure-alls" for miscarriage. "Studies show no benefits [for these]," Morris says. He points out, "Even a woman who suffers three miscarriages in a row has a 50% chance of having a live baby the next time. So Doctor X can claim a 50% success rate [no matter what] treatment he's peddling."

How do you know if you're dealing with a reputable fertility expert? Most deceptive salesmen claim to be misunderstood by the medical community. They say they've had success in areas in which no one else does. A final red flag: If your insurance won't pay for it, do some investigation to learn why.

"Remember, miscarriages are not rare," says Morris. "Approximately 50% of women have one. They're not doing anything wrong. Instead of accepting some of these claims, they should remain calm and talk to those with real statistics." He adds, "A supportive physician can make all the difference."

## Happy Endings

Even though the loss of a pregnancy can be heartbreaking, most couples who decide to try to conceive again go on to have a healthy baby. "If it is a first miscarriage, a woman should take solace in the fact that her odds of being able to carry her next pregnancy to term are roughly the same as any other woman embarking on a pregnancy," says Douglas.

And there's even some solace to be found in the loss, as the Blaneys — who, despite some difficulty conceiving again are now counting the days until the birth of their child — have found. "Colin and I are both really glad we went through everything we did to get pregnant the second time," says Erika. "We appreciate it so much more. It's such a gift. The loss, the grieving and the process of trying to conceive again have made us stronger. I really understand how special it is to be pregnant." @

*About the author: Mary Lebeau is an ePregnancy contributing editor and a New Jersey mother of five.*

## Comfort and Support

If you'd like more information about miscarriages or would like to get involved in a miscarriage support group, these online organizations can help. To contact them, just click to ePregnancy.com, scroll down the home page to the Go Codes section and enter the corresponding number.

**Miscarriage Support Auckland, Inc.:** This site is run by a group of volunteers who have all experienced some type of pregnancy loss. They can offer support and information for couples who have suffered a miscarriage. Go Code 8063

**Empty Cradles:** Based on the belief that "A mother's heart never forgets," this site offers grieving parents some ways to memorialize their lost child. Go Code 8064

**Silent Grief:** This company's goal is to offer "A message of hope for the grieving heart." They offer support through informative articles, chat rooms and more. Go Code 8065