



# When the baby dies before birth Are you aware?



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I am 36 weeks pregnant. The doctors confirmed that my baby had died inside the womb. What are the reasons for my baby to die inside the womb? How do I give birth to my baby? Will this happen again in my subsequent pregnancies?





Being told your baby is dead at birth is very difficult. It is a very sad situation for parents, relatives and friends. In such instances, you and your family will have strong support from the medical team. But at the time, even if the reasons for the baby's death are explained, the mental state is not good enough to understand everything clearly, so it is important to give the reasons in writing.

This leaflet will inform you about the support you will receive from the medical staff and the advice you will be given for future pregnancies if you are faced with such a situation. This leaflet provides summarized information; if you want to know more about this, you can speak with a doctor.

### Why does the baby die at birth?

The question asked by many parents as to why the baby dies before birth cannot be explained in every case, although, in about 50% - 70% of such deaths, the reasons can be identified. About one out of every 200 births is stillborn.

The common cause of the baby's death in the mother's womb is that the baby has not developed properly. Other reasons for the baby's death before birth include certain infectious conditions, abnormal growth of the baby, maternal diabetes, early separation of the placenta before birth (placental abruption), and pre-eclampsia (high blood pressure and excessive protein in the mother's urine). If your baby dies for any reason, you and your partner will have the opportunity to ask the reason for it.

### How do you know if your baby is dead before birth?

An ultrasound scan can confirm this. The scan can show that the baby's heartbeat has stopped. In such instances, a second scan will be offered to reconfirm the baby's death.

Even when the doctors have confirmed that your baby is dead, there are times when you feel the baby moving inside the womb. This is because the dead baby is floating in the amniotic fluid. Such situations are very distressing to the mother, and the healthcare team's support is very important.

### What happens after confirmation?

After confirming the baby's death, the doctor will inform you and your partner about it. You will be informed about the methods to give birth and the tests you may need to do. Also, the medical team will provide you and your partner with all the necessary support and time to decide on the tests and delivery method. The doctor will also pay attention to the mother's health by testing for infections and pre-eclampsia.

### What are the methods of delivery?

Your doctor will discuss the method and timing of delivery with you and your partner. The decision is made based on the mother's health status, information from previous births, the status of your pregnancy and your personal preferences.



Even after delivery, the healthcare team will give you extra attention. You will be allowed to be with your family members.

### Inducing labour with medications

After it is confirmed that the baby is dead, labour can be induced with the help of medication. In some cases, taking into account the mother's physical and mental health, she may be given the opportunity to go home and return before giving birth. There are various methods of artificially inducing labour; your doctor will inform you about them.

### Waiting until delivery occurs naturally

When it is confirmed that the baby is dead, some mothers prefer to wait until the baby is born naturally instead of giving birth by artificially inducing labour pains. Usually, waiting a few days is not a problem if the water bag is intact and the mother is physically well. Most women will go into labour naturally within three weeks of the baby's death inside the womb. A woman who waits until the baby is delivered naturally should be aware that the baby's appearance will change when the delivery is delayed from the time of the baby's death.

If you have decided to wait until the birth happens naturally, you may be advised to stay in the hospital, where the doctors will monitor you closely. In particular, you will be investigated for infections and reduced platelets in your blood, which can lead to excessive bleeding. If you are diagnosed with an infection or pre-eclampsia, or your blood tests show that delaying delivery would put your health at risk, you will not be allowed to wait for natural delivery. Instead, the delivery may be induced. Some women may avoid waiting for natural birth and choose to expedite delivery due to anxiety caused by delaying childbirth.

### How do you deliver the baby when it is confirmed that the baby is dead?

Usually, in such cases, a vaginal birth is recommended.

It helps to;

- Minimize the risk to the mother
- Allow the mother to go home sooner
- Reduce the recovery time
- Reduce the possibility of complications in future pregnancies

After considering all risk factors, including your preferences, your doctor will decide on the mode of delivery. If you are at risk of bleeding due to low platelet count or infection, you may not be given an epidural, but other pain relief methods will be offered.



### **If you have had a previous caesarean section?**

If you have had one previous caesarean section, you will be allowed to go through natural labour pains after discussing with you and considering your health condition. Induction of labour, however, is not recommended. You will be offered a planned caesarean section if you have had more than one caesarean section.

### **What happens when your baby is born?**

Giving birth to a stillborn baby is a distressing experience for parents, relatives and friends. Therefore, the medical staff will provide you and your family with extra support. You and your family can choose to see and hold the baby soon after birth, a little later, or not see the baby at all. Also, you can see and hold the baby for as long as you want. Parents can also keep mementoes of the baby, such as photos, hair, handprints or footprints.

### **What happens after the baby is born?**

After the birth of the dead baby, the last rites of the baby are carried out according to the parent's wishes. Therefore, if the parents express their desire to practice their religious beliefs, they will be allowed to do so. The baby's death is registered when the baby is born at or after 24 weeks.

If the mother has no other concerns or health problems, she can go home the day after the delivery. Some mothers may, however, refuse inpatient treatment in the hospital, depending on their mental status.

After giving birth to the baby, some mothers may experience breast milk production. This is very difficult for the mother, both mentally and physically. Therefore, doctors will prescribe medication to those mothers to stop breast milk production. After giving birth, you will have pain and bleeding, as seen after a normal delivery. However, medical advice should be sought immediately if there are other health problems, such as:

- ***Excessive bleeding***
- ***Unrelenting pain in the lower abdomen***
- ***Purulent vaginal discharge***
- ***Feeling tired***
- ***Pain in the legs***
- ***Difficulty in breathing***
- ***Coughing up blood***
- ***Chest pain***



## What tests are suggested for you after delivery?

You will be offered tests for you and the baby to identify the cause of the baby's death. A definite cause can be found in about 50%-70% of stillbirths; however, a definite cause cannot be identified in some. Additionally, these tests are helpful when planning your future pregnancies. Thus, you and your partner will need to sign a consent form for specific tests that are proposed to be done. The tests you will be offered are as follows:

- Tests to check for problems in your pregnancy, such as pre-eclampsia or infections or if you have problems with your kidney or liver.
- Blood tests to check for diabetes.
- Blood tests to check for thyroid problems.
- Blood tests to determine if you have an increased risk of blood clots.
- Swabs are taken from the mother's vagina, cervix, placenta and baby to check for infection.
- A blood sample or skin biopsy is taken from the baby to check for abnormal chromosomes (many stillbirths are caused due to abnormal chromosomes). You and your partner will also be tested if the baby is confirmed to have a chromosomal abnormality.
- A postmortem examination can provide important information on the cause of your baby's death. It can be limited or detailed according to the parent's wishes. You will need to consent and sign a form for this to be arranged. Your individual rights and religious beliefs will always be respected.
- Examination of the placenta, even in the absence of a postmortem examination, may provide valuable information about the baby's death. It does not require parental consent.

## How is the follow-up of the mother after delivery?

It is recommended that you meet your doctor to discuss the results of the tests and to follow up on your health after the delivery. Usually, this appointment is arranged after you receive the results of the tests. If your baby has had a post-mortem, the appointment will be scheduled around six weeks after the delivery. It is helpful to write down any questions you have in mind beforehand so the discussion is more effective. Also, if you wish to have another baby, you can discuss the care you will be offered with the doctor.





## What are the extra precautions to be taken when getting pregnant again?

If you wish to become pregnant again, informing the doctor about it and meeting the doctor immediately after confirming the pregnancy is essential. Due to the anxiety caused by the experience of the previous pregnancy, you will be offered extra antenatal visits to the doctor. During this pregnancy, you will be given additional support by the doctor and midwife looking after you. If the cause of your previous child's death has been confirmed, measures will be taken during this pregnancy to prevent such a situation from occurring.

Thank you.

