

What Happens Now?

Practical advice and guidance following a stillbirth ...



We are sorry that your baby has died, or you have been told that they may not survive the birth. Giving birth to a stillborn baby is a traumatic and unexpected experience and the staff want to support and guide you through what happens next at this devastating time. This booklet has been written to support you in making the decisions that are right for you, your baby and your family. If anything is unclear, please do not hesitate to ask a member of staff caring for you.

What is a stillbirth?

A baby who is with no signs of life after 24 weeks of pregnancy is known as a stillbirth.

In 2022, around 1 in every 250 pregnancies ended in a stillbirth in the UK, meaning 8 babies were stillborn every day (ONS, 2024).

Why does a stillbirth happen?

It is not always known why a stillbirth has happened and around 60% of stillbirths are unexplained. There is a common misconception that stillbirths only happen in high-risk pregnancies or when there is a known problem, but stillbirth can affect any mum at any time. Health conditions such as undiagnosed diabetes and thyroid problems can increase the risk, as well as problems specific to pregnancy- high blood pressure, infection, abnormal development of the baby and early separation of the placenta. Some babies die because they were not growing properly.

Following a stillbirth, you will be offered tests to try and determine why your baby has died. These include blood tests and swabs, detailed examination of the placenta (afterbirth), genetic testing on the baby and if you wish, a post-mortem examination. We offer 2 types of post-mortem examination, and these will be discussed with you during your stay. You can choose to have as many or as few tests as you wish.

What happens next?

If your baby has died before labour, you will, in most cases, need to give birth. Unless there is a medical reason for you to have a caesarean section, we usually recommend that you give birth to your baby vaginally. This is usually medically safer for you, and you are likely to make a quicker physical recovery.

The thought of going through labour and giving birth to a baby who has died may come as a shock and we will support you through this. Most mothers who have been through this experience say that it feels right to have been able to go through labour and give birth to their baby.

If you have health conditions or concerns, we may recommend a medical induction straightaway, but if you are well, you will have the option to go home and think about your options or wait for labour to start naturally.

If you decide to go ahead with a medical induction, you will be given a tablet called Mifepristone, which works to prepare your body for labour and reduce pregnancy hormones. After a brief period of observation, you will be discharged home and will be asked to return 36-48 hours later to begin the labour process.

What happens during my stay in hospital?

You will be cared for in your own room on the Labour ward at Calderdale Royal hospital. Family members and friends are welcome to visit you during your stay, and we have facilities to make hot drinks and for someone to stay with you overnight.

When you are admitted onto the ward, a midwife will care for you and explain what will happen next. When you are ready, your observations will be taken and then prostaglandin (misoprostol) tablets will be given to you either by mouth or vaginally until you have regular contractions and the baby is born. If after 5 doses of medication the baby has not been born, there will be a brief period of rest before a 2nd round of medication is given. For a small number of women, the afterbirth (placenta) does not deliver after the baby is born and further medication may be required, or it may need to be removed in theatre.

Will I be able to have any pain relief?

We aim to keep you as comfortable as possible during your labour and birth, and there will be a range of pain relief methods available to you including paracetamol, gas and air, injectable medication and epidural anaesthesia. If there are no concerns with your health, you may opt for a waterbirth or to labour in our birth pool.

What do I need to bring into hospital with me?

It is difficult to predict how long your stay in hospital will be and will usually depend on your physical wellbeing and how you feel after the birth. You may wish to go home a few hours after baby is born or may prefer to be with your baby for a few days. We suggest that you bring an overnight bag with toiletries, nightwear, a change of clothes and plenty of underwear, breast pads and sanitary towels. You may wish to bring something to read, some light snacks and drinks and a camera or mobile phone if you want to take your own photographs of baby. If you have any clothes, blankets or special items which you want to leave with your baby, you are encouraged to bring these, although we have lots of clothes, burial gowns, cardigans, hats and blankets in a variety of sizes which you are welcome to have.

After the Birth

Can I see/ hold/touch my baby?

It can be a daunting experience seeing your baby for the first time. The staff caring for you will support you to see, touch and hold your baby if you want to and make memories for you to take home. These include hand and footprints, casts and photographs and the opportunity to have a lock of hair, your baby's name band and cot card. You are welcome to bring your own camera, and photographs can be taken with you and other family members. Your baby can be washed and dressed in any clothes that you provide and any blankets, teddies, family photographs can stay with baby once you leave the hospital. We can provide you with a Memory Box and we have tiny clothes, nappies, blankets and wraps which you are welcome to use and then take home with you. We aim to accommodate any other requests you may have about how your baby is cared for and can assist you with any other memories you wish to make.

We have links with the charity 'Remember my Baby' who can attend the hospital and offer a specialised bereavement photography service for you and your family. We can also provide Aching Arms bears, Lexi Dolls and memory candles which you are welcome to take home with you.

We have Ibraheems Gift packs for families of the Muslim Faith who do not want any traditional memory making and can provide white cloth for shrouding of baby before burial.

The time you have with your baby is very precious and you may stay with him or her for as long as you wish. We have a cold cot (Abi cot) and special cooling mattresses' available which allow your baby to remain with you for the entirety of your stay if this is your preference.

If you do not wish to see or hold your baby, you will not be pressurised into doing so, and the taking of any mementoes will be with your consent.

Can my baby be blessed?

The Chaplaincy staff are available to offer comfort and support you, regardless of whether you have a faith or not. You may wish your baby to be welcomed, named or blessed during your stay in the hospital and we aim to facilitate this depending on the availability of the pastoral team. Your own minister is welcome to attend. For those of the Islamic faith we have Muslim chaplains (male or female) who can offer support.

Can I have a birth certificate for my baby?

It is a legal requirement that any stillborn baby is formally registered. Before leaving the hospital, staff will complete the appropriate documentation and notify the Registry Office of your baby's birth. We can make the appointment for you to register the birth if you are ready before discharge, or you can arrange the appointment later. You have 6 weeks to register baby's birth.

Births can be registered at:

The Calderdale Register Office
Spring Hall Mansion
Huddersfield Road
Halifax HX3 0AQ

Tel: 01422 288080

After the registration you will be given a Certificate of Stillbirth to keep, and a burial/cremation certificate will be sent to the funeral director who is arranging the funeral.

Births can be registered at a Registry office closer to your home and the appropriate documentation send out to you. This may cause a small delay in funeral arrangements.

Who can register?

If you are married, then either of you can register your baby's birth. If not, you both need to attend if the father's details are to be included on the birth certificate.

Can I see my baby again once I go home?

Once you have left the Maternity Unit it may be possible for you and your family to visit your baby again - at the hospital, the Funeral Director's Chapel of Rest or your local place of worship or Mosque.

Can I hold a funeral for my baby?

Saying goodbye to your baby is an important part of acknowledging your loss and beginning to grieve, and attending a funeral can be part of this. All families who lose a baby at the time of birth are offered a hospital burial or cremation and given the option to attend or not. Each funeral is for an individual baby and there is no cost to families for a basic funeral.

You can opt to have your baby cremated without attending the service but still have the cremated remains (ashes).

A hospital funeral includes the services of a funeral director with or without the support of a hospital Chaplain. Funerals can be religious or non-religious in character (and are often somewhere between), and we will work closely with you to ensure the funeral expresses your wishes and beliefs. You are encouraged to choose your own music and readings or poems, and bring along pictures, teddies and flowers. If other children are in the family and are going to attend, you may wish to consider how to involve them.

Our Muslim chaplains are experienced in supporting you with appropriate burial arrangements for Muslim babies.

Hospital burials will be at **Lockwood Cemetery, Huddersfield, Stoney Royd** or **Exley Cemetery, Halifax**.

Cremations will be held at **Parkwood Crematorium, Elland**.

Once you have decided on the right funeral for your baby, it usually takes place within 1-6 weeks, but this will depend on what investigations you have chosen. If a post-mortem examination has been performed and you want to include the tissue taken for testing in the funeral, this can delay the funeral process for up to 3 months.

If you do not wish to be involved in the funeral service, your baby will still be treated with the utmost of respect according to your wishes and faith.

Alternatively, you may wish to make private funeral arrangements for your baby, and you will need to contact a funeral director and clergy of your choice who will instruct you further.

There is also the option of taking your baby home and arranging your own burial and further guidance is available from the hospital.

How will I feel physically after a stillbirth?

Following the birth, you will have vaginal bleeding for around 4-6 weeks. In the early days, this bleeding can be quite heavy, and you may experience some mild cramping. This should become lighter after the first 3 or 4 days. It is advisable to use sanitary towels rather than tampons to reduce the risk of infection. If the bleeding becomes very heavy with clots, you experience a lot of abdominal pain or the discharge becomes offensive smelling, it is important that you contact your GP or Maternity Assessment Centre.

If you have had any stitches, it is important to look after them and maintain good hygiene to prevent any infection. These may be uncomfortable for the first week and a mild painkiller should help. They usually dissolve in 4-6 weeks.

It is important to try and look after yourself and your general wellbeing and although you may not feel like eating and drinking, trying to have something little and often will help in your physical recovery.

You may produce breast milk in the days following the birth and we will have a discussion with you regarding your breast care options while you are in hospital. You may opt to take medication to reduce breast symptoms, wait for natural suppression, or consider the option of donating breastmilk to our local breastmilk bank in memory of your baby.

The Hospital Review

If your baby is stillborn, it is a national requirement that we conduct a review into the care you received throughout your pregnancy and after the loss of baby. This is called a Perinatal Mortality Review (PMRT).

The review will involve members of staff from this hospital and an external reviewer. The aim is to work out why baby died and to see if we can learn anything from your baby's death. An information booklet about this review will be provided before you leave the hospital and you will have the opportunity to discuss and feedback on your care. A member of the review team will be in touch in the months after the birth to ensure that we have all your questions and you are informed of the progress of the review. The booklet can be provided in English, Urdu, Punjabi and Arabic.

Will I have any follow-up?

Following discharge from the hospital, you will be offered a home visit or phone call from a community midwife. Telephone support will be provided by a bereavement midwife according to your needs and wishes, and the Chaplaincy staff are available to support you if you wish. You will be given contact numbers and support leaflets when you are discharged home.

A follow-up appointment with a Consultant Obstetrician will be offered to you usually 2-6 months after the birth of baby. This appointment may be delayed if you opted for a postmortem and we are waiting for results. The appointment will give you the opportunity to discuss what has happened, find out the results of any investigations performed and discuss future pregnancies and is optional.

Is there any ongoing help after I go home?

The emotional impact of baby loss is long lasting. Losing a baby is an experience that many will share, but everyone experiences grief differently. For some, expressions of grief will be overwhelming and public, for others grief may be private but no less deeply felt.

Feelings of shock, grief, depression, guilt, loss and anger are common. Grief may produce physical symptoms as well as emotional ones. Disturbed sleep, lack of appetite, nausea, anxiety and palpitations are normal and may be eased by discussing them with your partner, friends, with a doctor or midwife, or with someone who can listen and understand. When you are discharged, the staff will provide you with a list of helpful organisations and support leaflets.

Local support can be offered by the Forget me Not Children's Hospital and counselling arranged through Talkthru. Other options are available both locally and nationally.

The Chaplaincy department can also provide support and guidance irrespective of your Faith.

Contact Numbers

Bereavement Midwife

Tel: 07500761111

Screening Midwives

Tel: 01422 222123

Labour Ward

Tel: 01422 222129

Maternity Assessment unit

Tel: 01422 224392

Calderdale Royal Hospital Switchboard

Tel: 01422 357171

Huddersfield Royal Infirmary Switchboard

Tel: 01484 342000

General Office Calderdale

Tel: 01422 222088

Help and support

Chaplaincy Department: Contact via HRI and CRH Switchboard

Tel: 01484 342000 or 01422 35717

Talkthru: Revenue Chambers, St Peters Street, Huddersfield, HD1 1DL

Tel: 01484 515137

Email: office@talkthru.org.uk

Web: www.talkthru.org.uk

SANDS (Stillborn and Neonatal Death Society)

Tel: 0808 1643332

Email: helpline@sands.org.uk

If you have any comments about this leaflet or the service you have received you can contact :

Sarah Hall
Bereavement Midwife
Calderdale Royal Hospital
Telephone No: 07500 761111
Sarah.hall@cht.nhs.uk

Ann Frost
Maternity Matron
Calderdale Royal Hospital
Telephone No: 01422 222947
Ann.frost@cht.nhs.uk

www.cht.nhs.uk

If you would like this information in another format or language contact the above.

Potřebujete-li tyto informace v jiném formátu nebo jazyce, obraťte se prosím na výše uvedené oddělení

Jeżeli są Państwo zainteresowani otrzymaniem tych informacji w innym formacie lub wersji językowej, prosimy skontaktować się z nami, korzystając z ww. danych kontaktowych

ਬ ਤੁਸੀਂ ਇਹ ਜਾਣਕਾਰੀ ਕਿਸੇ ਹੋਰ ਖ਼ਾਸ਼ੂਪ ਜਾਂ ਭਾਸ਼ਾ ਵਿੱਚ ਲੈਣਾ ਚਾਹੁੰਦੇ ਹੋ,
ਤਾਂ ਕਿਰਪਾ ਕਰਕੇ ਉਪਰੋਕਤ ਵਿਭਾਗ ਵਿੱਚ ਸਾਡੇ ਨਾਲ ਸੰਪਰਕ ਕਰੋ।

اگر آپ کو یہ معلومات کسی اور فارمیٹ یا زبان میں درکار ہوں، تو
برائے مہربانی مندرجہ بالا شعبے میں ہم سے رابطہ کریں۔

"إذا احتجت الحصول على هذه المعلومة بشكل مغاير أو مترجمة إلى لغة مختلفة فيرجى منك الاتصال بالقسم
المذكور أعلاه"