

# What Happens Now?

## Practical advice and guidance following a stillbirth ...



We are sorry that you have had a stillbirth. Being told that your baby has died before birth is devastating and most families will be left feeling extremely distressed and the staff caring for you are here to care for you and support you to make 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 stillborn baby is one who has died before or during birth at or after 24 weeks of pregnancy (countthekicks, 2017). Currently, around 1 in 7 babies are stillborn each day in the UK.

### Why does a stillbirth happen?

There is a common misconception that stillbirths only happen in high risk pregnancies or when there is a known problem. However, stillbirth can affect any mum at any time. Several risk factors may increase the chance of having a stillbirth and mothers who are older, smoke or drink heavily in pregnancy or are overweight have a higher risk of having a stillbirth.

Maternal health conditions such as poorly controlled or undiagnosed diabetes, thyroid problems and blood clotting disorders are also known to increase the chance of a stillbirth as well as problems specific to pregnancy such as cholestasis (a liver condition occurring in pregnancy), high blood pressure, infection, abnormal development of the baby and early separation of the placenta.

A baby may also die in the womb (uterus) because he or she was not growing properly.

Sometimes a reason may be found to explain why this has happened to you, but in some cases, no underlying cause is found, even with a full range of tests.

Following a stillbirth, you will be offered investigations ranging from simple blood tests and swabs, to investigations on the placenta (afterbirth), genetic testing on the baby and if you wish, a post-mortem examination. You can choose to have as many or as few tests as you wish. If you wish your baby to have a post-mortem examination, this will be performed at Manchester Children's Hospital and a specially trained midwife or Senior doctor will discuss this with you during your stay.

## What happens next?

Following the confirmation that your baby has died, a member of staff, usually a Senior Doctor or midwife will discuss with you what happens next. If you are already in labour, strong pain relief will be offered to you and support provided by an experienced midwife. If you are not in labour and there are no concerns for your health, you may wish to go home and wait for labour to happen naturally. Alternatively, you may wish to start the labour process as soon as possible and will be offered medication to get your body ready for labour. There are different ways of inducing the labour and staff will discuss which is the most appropriate way for you. Often these methods involve giving Mifepristone, a medication which reduces the pregnancy hormone progesterone making the uterus softer and more sensitive to other treatments. If you take mifepristone, following a short period of observation, you will be encouraged to go home and will be asked to return 36-48 hours later to start the labour. If at any time after taking the mifepristone tablet you feel unwell, experience pains/contractions/ vaginal discharge, persistent vomiting or diarrhoea we would encourage you to ring the ward for further advice.

Occasionally, after taking mifepristone, the labour may start on its own.

## What happens during my stay in hospital?

You will be cared for on the Labour ward at Calderdale Royal hospital. The staff caring for you and your family understand that this is a difficult time and are there to support and care for you and answer any questions that you may have. Family members and friends are welcome to visit you during your stay and your partner is welcome to stay, to support and comfort you. Facilities are available to make hot drinks and for someone to stay with you overnight. We have special cooling mattresses available which allow your baby to remain with you for the entirety of your stay.

When you are admitted onto the ward, a midwife will care for you throughout your stay and will explain what will happen next. If you are having your labour induced, you will have your observations taken and then be given further medication to start contractions. The length of labour can be extremely variable and support will be given to you throughout.

## Will I be able to have any pain relief?

We aim to keep you as comfortable as possible during your time in hospital and there will be a range of pain relief available for you from simple pain relief such as paracetamol and gas and air, to strong injections such as pethidine and epidural anaesthesia.

## 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. Some families wish to go home a few hours after their baby is born while others prefer to be with their baby for a few days. We suggest that you bring an overnight bag with toiletries, nightie or pyjamas, a change of clothes and plenty of underwear 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 your 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 tiny clothes, hats and blankets which you are welcome to have.

## After the Birth

### Can I see/ hold/touch my baby?

It can be a very 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 take mementoes for you to take home. These include taking hand and footprints and casts if appropriate, taking a lock of hair, a name card and bracelets and photographs will be taken on a memory card for you to take home. You are welcome to bring your own camera and photographs can be taken with you and your family members. Your baby can be washed and dressed in any clothes that you have and you may want to bring blankets/ teddies/ photographs and any other items which you wish to stay with them once you leave hospital. We have links with the local charity 'Remember my Baby' who can attend the hospital and offer a specialised bereavement photography service for you and your family.

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 will provide you with a 'Memory Box' to put all your mementoes in and we have tiny clothes, Blankets of Love and knitwear 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 can also provide Aching Arms bears and Name-a-Star kits from Our Sleeping Angels which you are welcome to take home with you.

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 usually 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 and /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 baby born after 24 weeks of pregnancy has his or her birth registered at the Registry Office. On leaving the hospital you will be given a completed Stillbirth Certificate which will need to be given to the Registrar.

**Appointments at the Registry Office need to be made in advance and babies born at Calderdale Royal Hospital or at home within the Calderdale area will need to be registered at:**

**The Calderdale Register Office:**

Spring Hall Mansion

Huddersfield Road

Halifax HX3 0AQ

Tel: 01422 288080

**Babies born at Huddersfield Royal Infirmary or at home within the Kirklees area will need to be registered at:**

**Huddersfield Register Office:**

1113 Ramsden Street

Huddersfield

HD1 2SX

Tel: 01484 221030

Once this has been done, you will be given a Certificate of Stillbirth to keep and a Burial/Cremation certificate which needs to be handed to your chosen Undertaker or the Bereavement Officer at the Hospital. The Bereavement Officer can be found in the General Office at Calderdale Royal Hospital on the 1st floor near the main entrance.

## Who can register?

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

## The Coroner

In some cases it may not be possible for the Hospital Doctor to issue a Certificate and the baby's death will be referred to the Coroner.

The Coroner is a qualified Doctor or Lawyer who will look into deaths where the medical cause of death is unknown. Sometimes, the Coroner will order that a post-mortem is performed to determine how your baby has died. In this situation the funeral can only take place once a Certificate is issued after the post-mortem.

If your baby's death has been referred to the Coroner, the Coroner's Officer will contact you to give you advice and support.

## 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 given the option of attending a 'hospital funeral', but you do not have to attend. Each funeral is for an individual baby and there is no charge for such funerals.

The hospital funeral includes the services of a funeral director who will help you decide whether to have a burial or cremation, and whether to use the support of a hospital chaplain. Funerals can be religious or non-religious in character (and are often somewhere between) and our chaplains 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 bringing along such things as 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 funerals use Lockwood Cemetery, Huddersfield or Stoney Royd Cemetery, Halifax for burials. No decorative items are allowed on the grave, but there is the option to commission a plaque for your baby. Cremations are held at Parkwood Crematorium, Elland.

Once you have decided on the right funeral for your baby, it usually takes place within 1-3 weeks, but this will depend on what investigations you have chosen. If a post-mortem examination is undertaken and you want to include tissue taken for testing in the funeral, this can delay the funeral process by 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. If this is something you would like to do, a member of staff can give you further advice and written information on this.

## 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.

## How will I feel physically after a stillbirth?

Following the birth, you will have some degree of vaginal bleeding for between 2-6 weeks. In the early days, this bleeding can be quite heavy and be accompanied by some mild cramping, but this should become lighter after the first 3 or 4 days and be more like a period. 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.

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 also important to try and look after yourself and your general wellbeing and although you may not feel like eating/ drinking, trying to have something little and often will help in your physical recovery. You may also produce breast milk in the days following the birth, especially if your baby was born later in pregnancy. You will be offered medication to reduce the possibility of this happening whilst you are in hospital and wearing a well-fitting bra and taking a mild painkiller will help you feel more comfortable until it resolves. Some mothers want to donate their breastmilk to a local neonatal unit and this can be facilitated if it is something you feel is right for you.

## Will I have any follow-up?

Following discharge from the hospital, initial care should be provided by a community midwife who will offer you visits at home. 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 on discharge from the hospital.

A follow-up appointment with a Consultant Obstetrician will be offered to you and usually takes place 16 - 20 weeks after the birth of your baby. This will give you the opportunity to discuss what has happened, find out the results of any investigations performed and discuss future pregnancies. In cases where a post-mortem was performed, the follow-up may be delayed for as long as 24 weeks due to ongoing investigations and collaboration of results.

## Is there any ongoing help after I go home?

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 it may be very 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, such as disturbed sleep, lack of appetite, nausea and palpitations. These 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. There is no time limit to the grieving process.

Support and advice is available from many sources, both online and via local groups. The staff will provide you with a list of helpful organisations and leaflets before you go home.

There is a local SAND's group in Halifax which meets once a month for face to face support.

Talkthru can offer individual and couples counselling following bereavement and are free for you to contact if you are in need of further support.

The Forget Me Not Hospice in Huddersfield can also offer structured support and staff can refer you to them before or after you leave the hospital.

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

## Contact Numbers

<b>Bereavement Midwife</b>	Tel: 07500761111
<b>Screening Midwives</b>	Tel: 01422 222123
<b>Labour Ward</b>	Tel: 01422 222129
<b>Calderdale Royal Hospital</b> Switchboard	Tel: 01422 357171
<b>Huddersfield Royal Infirmary</b> Switchboard	Tel: 01484 342000
<b>General Office Calderdale</b>	Tel: 01422 222088

## Help and support

**Hospital Chaplains/Imams** 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](mailto:office@talkthru.org.uk) Web: [www.talkthru.org.uk](http://www.talkthru.org.uk)

**SANDS (Stillborn and Neonatal Death Society)** Tel: 0808 1643332

Email: [helpline@sands.org.uk](mailto:helpline@sands.org.uk)

### **Insight Healthcare Talking Therapies Calderdale**

15 - 17 Carlton Street, Halifax, West Yorkshire, HX1 2AL Tel: 0300 555 0191

**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](mailto:Sarah.hall@cht.nhs.uk)

**Or**

Ann Frost, Labour Ward Manager  
Calderdale Royal Hospital  
Telephone No: 01422 222947  
[Ann.frost@cht.nhs.uk](mailto:Ann.frost@cht.nhs.uk)

[www.cht.nhs.uk](http://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

ਚ ਤੁਸੀਂ ਇਹ ਜਾਣਕਾਰੀ ਕਿਸੇ ਹੋਰ ਪ੍ਰਾਚੂਪ 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"