

Making Arrangements After Infant Loss

(Neonatal Loss)



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

The loss of a baby can be devastating. You and your family may be overwhelmed by many powerful emotions and much confusion. We know families vary widely in how they experience loss. There is no one right or single path for loving families to take. How this loss is experienced may affect certain decisions you make including:

- **Seeing and holding your baby:** Many families find it meaningful to see and hold their baby. For many, this contact can help them grieve their loss. You may also choose to have photographs taken, footprints made, or to parent in other ways such as bathing, dressing, or singing to your baby to create memories. We support you and your family spending this time with your baby. 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. We encourage you and your family to spend as much time as you need with your baby.
If you decide not to see your 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 in 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:** A funeral home will need to be involved in the arrangements you make. Whether you choose burial or cremation, the funeral home will help coordinate the arrangements and will also complete the death certificate.

We understand you may feel overwhelmed making these difficult decisions. 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 you may have.

Will there be an autopsy?

You may choose whether or not to have an autopsy for your baby. It may be several weeks before the results of the autopsy 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 by phone to review the autopsy results and answer your questions. Oftentimes, results from an autopsy can help answer questions about what caused or contributed to the death, but this cannot be guaranteed. Autopsies are provided at no cost. 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?

If your baby was alive at birth, you will need to make private arrangements for burial or cremation with a funeral home. **Coordination with a funeral home is required by law, as the funeral home completes the death certificate.** This is required regardless of how long your baby lived or the length of your pregnancy at the time of the loss. Your chosen funeral home may work with Arborcrest Cemetery (2521 Glazier Way Ann Arbor MI, 48105) if you would like to have your baby buried within the C.S. Mott Children's and Von Voigtlander Women's Hospital Memorial Garden. Our social work staff can help you with this process and may assist with finding financial resources if needed.

What do I need to know when making a decision about burial or cremation?

The first step is to decide whether to have a burial or cremation. You may make this decision by yourself, or with your family. Our social workers and chaplains are also available to help answer questions if needed.

What if I choose to have a burial?

You and your family, with the help of a local funeral director, may purchase a plot for your baby. Some cemeteries have a special area for infant and pregnancy loss. You will need to plan for the costs 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. 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 options 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 other 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 available to help you identify a funeral home.

What if I need help paying for arrangements?

Many funeral homes provide low cost services to 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.

May I donate my infant 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.

Will the hospital arrange cremation on my behalf or perform cremation?

This is not an option at Michigan Medicine, but our social workers can assist you in connecting with a funeral home to make these arrangements.

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 any cultural or religious rites or rituals that are meaningful to you and your family. Please ask your nurse or social worker to contact the 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 Birth Certificate or Death Certificate from the hospital?

Michigan Medicine does not provide copies of Birth Certificates or Death Certificates. However, a nurse or hospital chaplain can provide your family with a Certificate of Remembrance if desired. If your infant was alive at birth, you will complete paperwork for both a Birth and a Death certificate. You may obtain these certificates through the Washtenaw County Clerk's Office of Records and Deeds at 734-222-6720. 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 around 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 UMHS 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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