

## 31. Recovering from Pregnancy Loss



### Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

**Maisie Hill**

**Period Power** with Maisie Hill

## 31. Recovering from Pregnancy Loss

If you are in the horrors with menstrual cycle issues or you want to learn how to harness your hormones then you are in the right place.

Welcome to the *Period Power* podcast. I'm your host Maisie Hill menstrual health expert, acupuncturist, certified life coach and author of *Period Power*. I'm on a mission to help you get your cycle working for you so that you can use it to get what you want out of life. Are you ready? Let's go.

Okay my lovelies, welcome to episode 31 of the podcast. Today I'm going to be talking about pregnancy loss. This is something that I have experience of personally as well as professionally. And when you go through pregnancy loss it can be very alienating. You can feel incredibly alone in your experience regardless of your relationship status. And it's an area that we could do with talking about more often. So here we go. I'm going to be talking about it today.

But before I get started I just want to remind you that if you go to the show notes or the podcast section of my website you'll find a transcript of each episode. So don't think that you've got to take notes through today's episode. All of the info's already there if you need it.

And I also want to say that everyone has their own preferences when it comes to the language we use when we're talking about this. And I have to say I don't particularly like the term 'pregnancy loss'. I'm using it for good reason today. But I just really remember my granny talking about death. And just imagine in your minds a 90 year old Scottish woman saying in a very firm way, "I can't stand it when people say." Well, she didn't speak like that. But she basically said, "I can't stand it when people say lost, nobody's lost." And that really stayed with me, it always has.

So, there's that aspect of it, but I think when it comes to pregnancy loss, the other reason I don't like it is it implies that the woman or person who's pregnant is at fault. Like there's something they've done or perhaps that they haven't done that's caused the 'loss'. So, I'm not a fan of it. But I'm

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using it today because today isn't solely about miscarriage. When I think of pregnancy loss that includes embryo loss.

So, if you've gone through an IVF cycle that included the embryo transfer, that loss, miscarriage, and termination, whatever the reason for it. Whether it's health reasons because of the baby's health or the person who's pregnant health, or for what we could call social reasons. It also includes ectopic pregnancy and stillbirth. And I couldn't think of anything else that allows us to include all of these experiences. And I definitely want to make sure that this is an inclusive conversation that makes space for all of those.

And as is my style, you know I kind of laugh and I'm light-hearted about things, and there might be moments. I don't know how this one's going to go to tell you the truth. But there might be moments where I am kind of laughing about my own experience. And I just wanted to take a moment to name that now because that's okay for me to do. If I do that, that's about my experience.

And I don't want to censor myself if that's kind of what comes up. Because I think it's also important for you to hear wherever you're at on your journey that it is possible for there to be some light-heartedness and even some fondness around pregnancy loss. That might feel so distant and so wild to you. But that might come through today. I have no idea. We're just going to have to see what happens. There could be tears. There might be laughter. Probably all of it.

And I think if you listen to the podcast regularly, then you know that that's my style. I like to talk about heavy shit. And I like to also make space for laughter and things along the way. And that's something that I really learnt when I was doing my acupuncture training in China because there you see really heavy stuff being handled in a very different way to how we do it in the west. So, there we go.

Okay, I'm also going to be focusing specifically on recovery from pregnancy loss. Because that's where I feel I can offer you the most help. And it's an

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area that's neglected and brushed under the carpet once someone's really beyond that initial physical recovery of their experience. And I will be talking about my experience throughout this. I have thought long and hard about what exactly to share with you. And I've been guided with what I think will be helpful.

Some of what I'm going to share, I'm sharing because I want to describe things that may have happened to you, they may not have. But if they have I want to talk about them so that you can make sense of your experience. Because I think a huge benefit to being involved in this work is that I was able to name what was going on as it was happening. And that made for, I would say a better experience.

My first pregnancy ended as a miscarriage. And we found out a couple of weeks after the miscarriage actually happened that it was a partial molar pregnancy which is a rare type of pregnancy. I think it's around one in 600 pregnancies are partial molar pregnancies. And it's where two sperm fertilize one egg. So, there's too much genetic information. And it's not a viable pregnancy, that would be the medical terminology for it. So, although there might be some early signs of a foetus, it won't develop into a baby. And instead, a mass grows in the uterus that resembles grapes.

And so, my miscarriage involved my uterus contracting and my cervix dilating. Essentially my body working to move that mass out. And for sure it was horrific. And it was the most bizarre and intense experience of my life. But there were positives to it at the time and also as time passed. And I know that will sound odd to many of you. But it's important for me to include that. I want you to hear that. I had that post birth high afterwards, the oxytocin rush that can happen.

And I also think one of the reasons that my son's birth was so quick when I had him, and it was so smooth was because I'd gone through the physical and emotional experience of a labour of sorts during that miscarriage. But I never thought I'd get over it. I never thought I'd be in this place with it. It was so devastating. It was agony as in I actually thought I was dying. I

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cried, and I cried, and I cried. I was angry, and heartbroken, and grieving for a while. And I thought it would occupy a place in me forever. I just thought it was going to be this heavy thing that I would always carry.

And I have carried it but in a very different way than I expected. It's there now in a really beautiful way. And I know when I say this that I speak about this with the privilege of someone who's miscarried once and who went on to have a child. I know that. Even prior to my second pregnancy though I had got to a very different place. And I've really been spending time thinking about why. Because I do think it's unusual or at least less common because most people I speak to really carry their experience and there's nothing wrong with that.

But it's tender and even raw for them years down the line even after they may have had other kids. And this relates to what I spoke about on last week's episode. And the reasons why someone might still be carrying the loss in that kind of way are nuanced. But there are some general issues that I see kind of on repeat over the years. And again, I just want to remind you, there's no right way to feel about pregnancy loss. And I'm not saying that you shouldn't be affected by it. That would be weird.

But I am speaking really in consideration of the women I've spoken to years and decades down the line who are deeply affected. And again, I'm not saying that they shouldn't be. But there are some things in common that they have shared with me such as lack of information at the time of what to expect in terms of the actual process that they were going through or procedures that were suggested to them, and the physical and emotional recovery.

Sometimes the medical care hasn't suited the circumstance. And I don't mean that it's been the wrong thing. It's just the context of it hasn't felt right for someone going through a pregnancy loss such as having ultrasounds or follow-up ultrasounds in a clinic where everyone else is pregnant. The services aren't set up. There's amazing professionals who are so wonderful

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in this work. But often it isn't ideal. It's not what we would want if we were going to create an ideal scenario.

And another big one is not having sufficient opportunities to talk about what happened to them and their experience. And not everyone does want to talk about it. But the folks I speak to generally want to. But with pregnancy loss those who haven't gone through it generally don't want to hear about it. They're in this Lala land where we just have babies and everything's great.

So today I'm going to talk you through what I did to recover. And you can take from it what you want. As I said, there's no right way. But my understanding of miscarriage from both western and Chinese perspectives helped me to accept and make sense of mine. And it provided me with ways to recover and heal. So, it's those that I want to share with you today.

And we all have experiences that are different. And I really encourage you to listen to your instincts and needs throughout this process, bearing in mind that this process could go on for many years. You just always want to be doing what you need to do to heal and take the time that you need. Because we have this idea that healing is a linear process, a nice neat one where we just gradually we get better until one day we're fine.

But it's messier than that, it can be two steps forward, five steps back. You might feel like you're doing well. And then all of a sudden this rush of new emotions enters your being. And with that suddenly it's the possibility of having to find new ways to understand and work through them. And loved ones and colleagues may also assume that you're doing well. "Isn't she doing great? Things are kind of back to normal." And it's like their relief because things are kind of better for them if you're okay.

So, they might be taken aback by sudden changes in mood and your wellbeing. So, it isn't fun, but it is healthy. And I have a friend of mine, Naomi Absalom who often says in her amazing yoga classes, "You're exactly where you need to be."

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And I think the more you can create space for that, the better. And in fact, it was Naomi's yoga classes that I would often cry about the miscarriage months after it had happened. Is it was just the right place for me to do that. That was a place where I could fall apart and be me. And my mat would just be covered in dots from where all my tears had landed.

But I'm kind of skipping ahead a bit here. So let me just backtrack a bit to immediately after so that I can go through this chronologically with you. So, we found out that the pregnancy in the doctor's words hasn't progressed normally on a Friday evening. And that all he could see was a mass of some kind. And at this point I was spotting and experiencing very slight cramps. So, he did say that the process might be happening anyway without them intervening, but to come in on the Monday to discuss options.

And I say this because it helped me to know that it was already over. There was no ambiguity. And I got to start grieving before the physical process really took over, which that's what happened on the Sunday. So, in the early evening I started contracting. And we went to hospital in all honesty because I really thought I was dying. We knew that there was this mass in there and I was in so much pain. I just thought well, that's been there for a while and maybe there's an infection. And maybe that's spreading and that's why I'm in so much pain. That's where my brain took me.

Sometimes it's bad to know things because your brain goes to these places. So, I just thought I was dying. We've got to get to the hospital because this is urgent. And it all happened pretty quickly. And as soon as the miscarriage finished I was just desperate to get out of the hospital. It was this really weird duality of utter relief that it was over and the rush of oxytocin, and kind of this, oh my God, I got through that, odd elation I suppose. And all the devastation and the heartbreak.

So, we got out of there pretty quickly. And I remember thinking how odd it must be. I mean you could just imagine being sat in this A&E, seeing me come in, be on the floor, writhing around in agony. Trying to take my clothes off because I got really hot, and I had all of these water bottles

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strapped to me. And then an hour later I just kind of walked out in this weird state of elation. Like I said, it was really bizarre.

Anyway, we got home, and I had this oxytocin high, this hormonal rush but I had nowhere to put it. So, something that happens after you give birth, and is involved in the breastfeeding and the bonding process is that you produce more oxytocin in that hour after birth than you'll do at any other point in your life. So, I was producing all this oxytocin, but I had nowhere to put it.

And at first that felt awful. I had no baby to give all that love to. But then I realised there was a place for me to put that love. And that I could kiss Paul, and I could hug Paul, and we could just hold each other and let that hormonal rush be expressed. And I clearly remember both of us saying, "This is really fucking weird", to each other. But I chose to trust my body's needs and we just went with it. And I'm really glad we did because it was a really special moment. And that's what I mean, even in the devastation there are these little things that are moments of fondness for me.

So, I was sad, and I was hurting and consumed by the grief, but I definitely had this additional dip in mood around the day three mark. So, three days or so after the miscarriage, which is common post birth too. Because I knew that I was able to name it and make sense of what was happening. Which is why I'm sharing these parts of my story with you in case you had a similar experience and you're suddenly like lights are going off, you're like, "Oh, that's what was going on."

Something I hadn't considered before was the impact of going through the physical process. But as I was preparing for this podcast, a friend of mine shared that following their loss they had a D&C which is a surgical procedure involving the dilation of your cervix and the removal of tissue from inside the uterus. And we were just comparing experiences because I went through this very physical process, and they didn't.



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And they were kind of curious about maybe there was something in what we've been left with in terms of our losses, that maybe the actual process by which it happened is one of the things that made a difference. And I don't know. That's a kind of impossible to say things. But they just weren't ready to do it. And the way they described their experience was like it was something that happened to them.

But I also have another friend who's had several miscarriages and having had D&Cs and also a miscarriage that was maybe more similar to mine. She said she'd always recommend having a D&C if that was an option. So, this is something that will vary. And I think no matter what happens there will always be something wrong with what happens because, this is going to sound very weird, but there's no such thing as a perfect pregnancy loss.

And at the time when this happened I had my own business. And that meant I was able to take two and a half off work. And that was followed by a slow and gradual return to work which also meant being upfront with my clients about what was going on. But thankfully they were all fantastic, and patient, and understanding. And Paul took a week off compassionate leave from his work. And that meant we could just be in it together and just ride the waves. And there were plenty of waves.

The Miscarriage Association actually have some guidance on this in terms of the legalities of time off here in the UK, so that will be in the show notes. And in many cultures around the world, a 40 day lying in period following childbirth is traditionally advised. And it's a time when you're taking care of those around you so that you can focus on yourself and your baby. And I actually think this is something we can consider after a pregnancy loss too. You may not be able to suspend your life for this long. But do what you can to do less and just reduce your expectation of yourself, give yourself space.

When I returned to work I very quickly realised that if I was crying by the time I got to the tube station that was a day to cancel my clients. And in some ways that was easy to do because I just knew I shouldn't be treating people. But it was challenging because I was self-employed. And ultimately

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I just decided that taking time off was valuable for my clients. That in me cancelling appointments on the day, I was demonstrating what it's like to truly take care of myself.

And it wasn't like it was this black and white thing. I couldn't have predicted when those tears would hit. And it wasn't feasible for me to just take endless months off. So, I had to find the middle ground. And my clients were so incredible. Many of them were also trying to conceive and had also experienced losses. So, it felt really appropriate for me to share that with them. And I was very fortunate in that.

And I did tell other people about what happened. A lot of people keep their pregnancy private until they're in the second trimester or they've had their first scan. But we'd actually told a fair few people because I knew that if I did miscarry I would also share that with those people. So that was the filter we used when we were deciding who we'd share the pregnancy news with.

But I told them knowing that some of them would respond to the news in ways that would annoy me. And I knew that I would receive texts that I didn't like because guess what? People say the 'wrong thing' all the time. Of course, they do, that's going to happen. But I think the best text I got was from my friend, Holly, who I think she just replied, "That fucking sucks." And I was like, "Yes. Yes, it does. Thank you for acknowledging that."

So, I gave myself the space to fully grieve. That's important to say. I had no expectation of when this would end. And I know when you're in it, it feels like it never will end. But I created the space for that, and it helped that I'd supported so many clients through similar things over the years. But I just let my emotions be there without judgement. I took those two and a half weeks off, I told people, I cancelled work if I needed to. I also referred most of my birth clients to other doulas because I knew I wasn't up for supporting someone with their birth until I'd processed what had happened to me.

In fact, I'd forgotten about this. But we were due to be on holiday when I miscarried. But my birth client at the time went into her 42<sup>nd</sup> week of

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pregnancy. So, we'd cancelled our holiday so that I'd be around to support her. And I was so thankful for that because if that had have happened another way, if she'd given birth earlier, I'd have gone through it whilst abroad.

So, we ended up taking that holiday a month later, and being on the coast, being in nature, eating amazing food, feeling the sun on my skin. That was all very supportive as well, and it was also when I got my first period post miscarriage. When we got back from the holiday I went back to see my old psychotherapist for a few sessions. I mean, he's not old, he's just my former psychotherapist. I wasn't seeing him at the time. But I went back to speak to him for a few sessions, and I spoke to our midwives about it.

I told the story of what happened multiple, multiple times to friends and colleagues. I also read a book. It was this collection of stories about pregnancy loss. And I just sat in the park one weekend reading it, crying for most of the weekend. And that's just what I needed. I will try and find the name of the book for you and put it in the show notes.

So, if you want to talk about your experience and how you're feeling, then do it. Pregnancy loss is usually an experience that just gets swept under the carpet. And some people will want to talk about it again and again. But at some point you might start to feel that other people are ready for you to stop talking about it and you might not be done.

So just now that there are organisations including The Miscarriage Association, they have a forum, and a helpline, and there's local support groups as well. But there are other charities and organisations who have similar things happening. And they can also support your partner if they want to talk about their experience because we also want to be acknowledging partners who have been affected by miscarriage too.

So, grieving a pregnancy loss is normal. I know that's really obvious, but I just want to say that. It's something to be supported, not fixed. Seeing practitioners who can acknowledge you in this space can make a big

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difference. So, seek out ones who are experienced and knowledgeable. You may find that a talking therapy suits you and is helpful. And there's also volunteers through The Miscarriage Association and these other organisations.

And the pain of miscarriage is complex. The emotional pain is tied up in the physical pain and vice versa. You might find that over the counter medication helps, but you can also request prescribed painkillers. Other options include acupuncture, which is great for managing pain, and reducing blood loss as well as helping with sleep and soothing you. I was permanently attached to a hot water bottle. That really helped for the best part of two weeks.

And as I kind of already mentioned, being physically intimate, holding each other, loving each other. That also helped to resolve physical pain. Oxytocin, the love hormone that I mentioned earlier, it's released when we have physical contact with someone else through hugging and also through being intimate and having sex. It helps to relieve pain, reduce inflammation, reduces stress, and makes us feel good. But I have to say something here and that's only have sex when you both feel ready for it. There's no rush. Don't put that on you, give yourself time to heal in all senses of the word.

Snuggling up on the couch will work really well as well. And massages and other treatments can be very supportive because having your loss acknowledged in a physical way can be very healing. So, you could consider the Arvigo Techniques of Maya Abdominal Therapy which is an abdominal and back massage which focuses on the pelvis. And practitioners teach you how to massage yourself which can help you to have a positive relationship with your reproductive system. And it can help you to recover from a pregnancy loss even years later.

And it is also very helpful in terms of preparing for a future pregnancy should that be something that you're planning for. But ultimately the power of physical touch and being held cannot be underestimated. Other physical aspects that you can consider include addressing any deficiencies that

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might be going on. And that's a specific language that we use in Chinese medicine, but you can take it to mean, do you feel strong and nourished?

Certainly, in Chinese medicine it's very common for folks who menstruate to be deficient. And a practitioner would want to strengthen and nourish you before you get into trying to conceive again. We often when we're working with clients in Chinese medicine speak about waiting several cycles before attempting to conceive again. So that might not be on the agenda for you. But we speak a lot about the importance of resting, and eating, and taking care of yourself, or ideally being taken care of. That's important too.

And as a very independent woman who likes to think I'm capable of anything and that I don't need anyone's help, I get how hard asking for help can be, but please do it. Just ask friends and family for their support. They're probably all too ready to help. But they might just need some guidance in doing so. They want to help but they don't know how to. So, you can make requests, things like cooking, cleaning, if you have other children, asking for help there.

And when it comes to food, eating foods that are warming and strengthening in nature is a great idea. This isn't the time to be eating cold salads or starving yourself. Think roasted meat and root vegetables. Soups that have bone broths, like chicken stock, which is really nourishing from the Chinese and western perspectives. Spices like cumin, chili, coriander, beans, black beans, kidney, beetroot, fennel, avocado, eggs, dark leafy greens, porridge, dates, apricots. All those things are going to be so helpful in building you back up again.

And if you've lost a lot of blood you might feel tired, and faint, and out of breath, and these are all signs of anaemia. So be sure to include iron rich foods in your diet. And we're talking there like red meat, sardines, lentils, beans, more dried apricots, as well as having vitamin C rich foods, because they aid the uptake of iron. That's why if you've ever been prescribed iron you will likely have also been told to take your iron supplement with orange juice.

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Taking a course of Chinese herbs can also nourish and build you up again. And I really recommend keeping your core warm as this can protect your reproductive system from invading cold, which might be this weird concept for you to hear, but it's something lots of cultures warn against. And it's also important to keep your feet warm, as cold can kind of enter the body through your feet.

I know this might sound a bit woo woo to some of you, but in terms of Chinese medicine we really do see internal cold as a problem when it comes to reproductive health because it can cause painful periods, fertility issues and miscarriages. So, we do bang on quite a bit about keeping your womb warm for good reason.

Now I'm going to guess that as I'm going through this, some of you will be thinking that this is a lot to do. As I said, take what you want from it, those of you who have had multiple losses might be thinking that you could do this process or your version of it maybe once, but that you wouldn't do this every time. And I want to lovingly challenge you on that. Why wouldn't you do this every time? Now, it's different if you don't need to or you don't want to.

But if your response is that you can't. Then find the ways that you can, because if you've gone through this multiple times then I would argue that you are most in need of this level of care. And if your loss happened some time ago, it's also not too late to give yourself this. You can do this now even if your loss happened months, or years, or decades ago. Many of you will have gone through this and never had an opportunity to process what happened, to process your emotions, to grieve and to recover in the fullest sense of the word. It's not too late to do that.

After the initial recovery period, I found the best way to get the emotional stuff moving and out of me was to move. Going out dancing, that was great medicine. And I also took part in a 30 day yoga challenge. So, you don't have to commit to something that intense. But do find ways of allowing

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yourself to let go. Giving yourself the space to fall apart somehow every day, you might not need to do it every day, but just planning for it will help.

And I also didn't get stuck back into cycle tracking. I let that relationship just happen by itself. You might have a version of this going on where because of your experience, your relationship with your body and with your cycle shifts. Makes sense. It's not a problem if that's what's going on.

I choose to see it like I'd had a falling out with an old friend. But with time we just ended up being in the same places, around the same people and gradually we started talking again, and we cleared the air, and we just found our friendship again. And I just let that unfold without any pressure, or expectation, or obsessing about it.

We also decided to celebrate the pregnancy because it was our first pregnancy, and it was special. And we didn't want the end of it to take away from the rest of it. And I remember in those early days, Paul talking about all the special moments that that pregnancy had brought us. And it was such a beautiful and tender conversation. And he was and is incredibly gentle, and loving, and considered in how he spoke about it. He's a really great man.

And I want to take a moment to say how wrong it is to assume that someone who knew they were pregnant for three days before miscarrying, experiences any less grief than someone who miscarried at three months. Or that the person who 'chose' a termination for social reasons versus having one after finding out that their baby has a congenital disorder. We want to include space for all of these experiences, or I do at least.

So, let's not minimise anyone's experience in miscarrying by doing so, or pregnancy loss of any kind. Phrases like, "At least you know you can get pregnant." Or "You just have to accept that this pregnancy wasn't to be." Or "You'll forget about it with time. You can try again." They're unlikely to help. If you're listening to this and you're privileged enough to be told about a pregnancy loss, simply acknowledging what happened is enough. As I said,

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“That fucking sucks.” Was the best response I had followed by, “Oh, bollocks.”

Okay, that’s it for today. Next week I’m going to be answering the questions that you’ve submitted about recovering from pregnancy loss, there is a part two to this. But before we wrap up, please take a moment to acknowledge your needs in this moment and honour them. If you need to move your body, message a friend, cry, write your thoughts down, punch a pillow, scream at no one. Orient yourself in the physical space around you by just noticing what’s there and describing it, whatever you need to do, let’s honour that.

Okay, I will catch you next week.

Thanks for listening to this week’s episode of the *Period Power* podcast. If you enjoyed learning how to make your cycle work for you, head over to [maisiehill.com](http://maisiehill.com) for more.