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**TIPS**  
on  
Healing  
from  
Pregnancy  
and Birth  
Trauma

Coping with Miscarriage  
and Infant Loss, Premature  
and Sick Newborns

Jo Spicer



# TIPS ON HEALING FROM PREGNANCY AND BIRTH TRAUMA

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COPING WITH MISCARRIAGE AND INFANT  
LOSS, PREMATURE AND SICK NEWBORNS

JO SPICER

The logo for 'Brightly Butterfly' features a stylized butterfly icon above the words 'BRIGHTLY' and 'BUTTERFLY' stacked vertically in a decorative, serif font.

BRIGHTLY  
BUTTERFLY

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**Tips on Healing from Pregnancy and Birth Trauma**

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## INTRODUCTION

“A woman who loses a husband is called a widow.

A husband who loses a wife is called a widower.

A child who loses his parents is called an orphan.

There is no word for a parent who loses a child.

That’s how awful the loss is.”

— —JAY NEUGEBOREN, AN ORPHAN’S TALE

When this quote was shared with me, it struck me to the core. We don’t have words for a parent who loses a child because it is not natural order of things. We grieve over the loss of any loved one, but the deep knowing that we are supposed to die before our children—our legacy, adds another layer of inexplicable sorrow.

My decision to write the book, ***When Pregnancy and Birth Don’t Go To Plan*** was made when the subject matter demanded to be written. I had just completed my first book in the Survive-Revive-Thrive Series, ***How Cancer Saves Lives***, and I’d shortlisted some topics from my personal experiences that I wanted to tackle next.

I was attending a Patient Experience Symposium as part of my partnership with NSW Health, and I met a fellow representative in the coffee queue. We started chatting and she shared the story of receiving her devastating Stage 4 cancer diagnosis she was pregnant with a healthy baby.

What an excruciating decision she had to make—to risk her own life and delay treatment, hoping she could continue to nurture her baby, or to terminate the pregnancy so that she could have life-saving surgery and chemotherapy.

Her doctors virtually insisted that she end the pregnancy and she did so, knowing full well that she might not ever be able to have another child.

How does one make peace with such a decision?

Similarly, two women I interviewed subsequently and included in ***When Pregnancy and Birth Don't Go To Plan***, came to almost identical crossroads at the 20-week mark of their pregnancies. Both couple's babies were diagnosed with Trisomy 18, a chromosomal abnormality which meant that the babies would not develop normally. Statistics show that babies affected this way live for at most, one week.

One mother chose to terminate and the other carried to term. Did one make the right decision and the other a wrong one? I believe that both women made the right decision for them and their families.

There are no right or wrong decision in these situations. No-one has the right to judge another person's choices—unless this has specifically happened to you, how can you possibly understand?

I admire the strength of both of these families who bravely processed the emotional pain and trauma of losing their baby and moved forward.

How did they heal from this unimaginable grief? I was privileged to learn from them both. In the following pages you will find their first-hand knowledge plus those of all the amazing women who shared their stories with me.

If you are dealing with this kind of pain and grief, I am so sorry for your loss. Know that you are not alone. We hope that the short tips in this book will help you to survive, revive and thrive.

JOSPICER

## FOR YOU: TAKING CARE OF YOUR BODY

**P**regnancy puts our bodies through some extreme physical changes. Our hormones cause havoc with our emotions and we find ourselves in the care of doctors, midwives and specialists who sometimes forget that though this might be their 1000th pregnant patient, this might be your first time. You need things explained in words that you can understand, not medical jargon that has you scrambling for Google.

Perhaps you have had a loss but your body is still full of hormones and you continue to feel pregnant. Or maybe you are pregnant after a loss and you feel anxious at every step.

At all of these stages, you will be engaged with medical professionals. Here are some tips to help you get the best care and support.

### **1. Doctors are Humans**

So many couples who shared their stories spoke of medical advice received from specialists who completely misread their situation. The important thing to remember is that doctors are humans too. Their opinion is exactly that—a diagnosis based on their knowledge and medical experience.

If the advice you are given does not sit well with you, do not hesitate to get another opinion to either verify what you have been told, or to provide a different perspective.

## **2. Ask Questions**

If your doctor explains things in medical jargon that you cannot understand, ask them to clarify what they are saying. It is their duty to ensure that you fully comprehend the information they are conveying to you. You are the steward of your body so it is vital that you know exactly what medication or treatment your body is being subjected to. Remember that doctors are professionals in the practice of medicine, not in the art of communication.

## **3. Seek Information**

There are many places to look for information. When you research online, check the sources and credibility of the material presented. There are a growing number of organisations who support the specific areas of early miscarriage, stillbirth, infant loss, birth trauma and early parenting.

If you are suffering from postnatal anxiety and depression, these support groups can also assist with your emotional and mental health by connecting you to counsellors and psychologists who specialise in these areas. You will find a free comprehensive list of groups here:

Guide to Support for Pregnancy and Birth Trauma

## **4. Talk to Peers**

There is nothing better than talking to someone who is experiencing or has experienced what you are going through. Even though their situation may be different to yours, the similarities can offer ideas and solutions that you may not have otherwise considered.

## **5. Speak Up**

Medical staff are not mind readers and many issues occur due to miscommunication. If you don't tell them about further developments in your symptoms, they won't know what you need. Because we are all raised to be polite and to not make a fuss, sometimes we put up with worsening symptoms when we don't need to.

If the hospital staff members are busy, be patient. It is unlikely that they are intentionally ignoring you and more likely that they are dealing with the urgent. Give them time to respond, but don't give up—keep calm and continue to seek their assistance when you need it.

## **6. The Right to Choose**

The strongest piece of advice from many women is to find the team to best support you through your pregnancy and birth. For some, hiring a doula and a midwife provides the reassurance of individual and personalised care. For others, attending a high-risk clinic on a regular basis is the path to ensure their baby's safety. Some women choose to have their own obstetrician while others decide not to have any scans.

There is no right or wrong way to be pregnant, deliver a baby, or parent a child. You have the right to choose as well as the right to change your mind.

## **7. Be Flexible**

Even with the most carefully laid plan, the unexpected can happen so it is imperative to also be flexible. Some of us are planners, others of us prefer to go with the flow. In consultation with your doctor or midwife it is definitely a good idea to have a preferred birthing scenario but to also be ready to move to a contingency plan if things don't happen the way that you hoped.

Your wellbeing and the safe delivery of your baby are the top priorities so be open to changes. Ask your medical team to explain the situation so you can understand why and what needs to be done.

## **8. Trust your instincts**

If you feel that something is wrong, then keep investigating until you get answers. So many women talked to me using words such as, "I instinctively knew something was not right," or "My instincts told me something was wrong." We know our bodies and when things are not as they are supposed to be.

## **9. Time to Heal**

When a woman becomes pregnant, her body is flooded with hormones, geared up for the task of growing a baby. No matter the outcome of your pregnancy, your body has undergone a dramatic change and it will never be exactly the same again.

Many of us put pressure on ourselves to restore our bodies and of course, each of us has a choice to make about how to do this. Whatever you decide, be kind to yourself. Don't set unrealistic expectations that cause anxiety and diminish your self-esteem.

Each of us needs time to heal from the physical effects of pregnancy and birth and it is important to give yourself the time and space to heal and to come back to a new normal.

## **10. Complementary and Alternative Therapies**

There are varying opinions on the efficacy of complementary and alternative therapies. Medical professionals can sometimes be sceptical because there are limited studies and research to support the positive effects. Even though there may not be documented medical benefits, more and more hospitals and medical professionals agree that they provide a positive benefit to a patient's wellbeing.

Here are some of the therapies found to help body and mind during and after pregnancy:

### **Acupuncture**

A treatment that involves inserting fine needles into the skin at specific points with the aim of balancing the flow of energy. It is used to cure illness and relieve pain.

### **Massage**

One of the oldest healing traditions. Maya Abdominal Massage Therapy is specifically effective in treating the reproductive organs.

### **Chinese Herbalist**

A practitioner will diagnose a patient and create a particular concoction of herbs accordingly.

### **Naturopathy**

Uses natural remedies to help the body to heal itself.

### **Chiropractic**

Chiropractic care is considered safe during pregnancy and it can greatly relieve back pain symptoms. It is also an effective treatment to restore health and alignment after childbirth.

### **Osteopathy**

In pregnancy, osteopaths can assist with lower back, hip, pelvic and sciatic pain.

**Yoga**

A mind and body practice that combines physical postures, breathing techniques and relaxation.

**Pilates**

A low-impact exercise that aims to strengthen muscles while improving postural alignment and flexibility.

## FOR YOU: TAKING CARE OF YOUR MIND

**T**here is no right or wrong way to feel when you experience pregnancy trauma. Whatever you feel is real and does not need to be justified. The path to healing yourself is yours to choose. What I want you to know is that there is help available to you at every stage. I invite you to investigate the following avenues that men and women have used to heal their pain and move forward.

### MENTAL HEALTH AND EMOTIONAL SUPPORT

#### **1. You are Not Alone**

Talking about what has happened to you and sharing your experience in a safe and caring environment with someone you trust, is the first step of feeling that you are not alone. You will be surprised by the number of people who, once you tell them about what has happened to you, will disclose that they have been affected themselves or by a loved one who has gone through a similar experience. The shared information can build supportive bonds and form new friendships.

One of the ways we can all help each other is to offer a safe space for sharing our pregnancy and birth trauma. Talking about it is a vital part of the healing process.

The more we talk about it, the greater the awareness of these issues and this fosters bringing change to the long-held social etiquette of suffering in silence.

## **2. Friends and Family**

When you are going through a traumatic time, close friends and family may want to do everything they can to support you. The important thing here is to work out what you need to feel supported. Be thankful and grateful for the efforts that people are making and make sure they know you appreciate their good intentions. But if they are helping out in ways that are not working for you, gently redirect them to something that would be acceptable.

You may not hear from some friends and family members. This does not necessarily mean that they do not care. Perhaps your trauma has reignited a past pain for them and being with you in that moment might be too confronting. There could be many other reasons why they feel unable to engage so don't write them off.

## **3. The 12 -Week Rule**

There is much discussion about this unspoken societal construct that dictates that we should not tell anyone about our pregnancy within the first 12 weeks in case something happens. There are no actual clinical guidelines as to when you should or should not announce a pregnancy.

The conundrum occurs when we experience loss—if have not told friends and family that we were pregnant, how can we now say that we have miscarried? At the very time when support is most needed, we fail to share our emotions and seek help.

If you are deciding what is best for you, seek all the information and assurance that you need to make your decision about when you feel that the timing is right for you to share your news.

## **4. Peer Support**

From my discussions with many families, one of the most helpful things they did was to seek the support of others who had endured similar experiences. They did this through a variety of ways, including online groups, face-to-face groups and social media groups.

The groups offer a place to share information and to ask questions that friends and family cannot understand. It is a safe arena to share and learn about beneficial ideas and resources. This nurturing environment is one that can also carry you through new pregnancy issues.

Peer groups can be found through support organisations. You can also search groups on social media to find the best fit for you.

. . .

## **5. Professional Support**

If you are struggling, it is vitally important to seek medical help. So many of us adhere to the ‘soldier on’ philosophy, suffering through our illnesses and thinking that they will eventually go away. When it comes to mental health and in particular, postnatal depression and anxiety, new mums can feel that their sadness will pass and that they are just tired from the sleep deprivation that comes with a newborn.

Seek help from health professionals. If you are having difficulties settling your baby or with breastfeeding, there are wonderful organisations who offer individual support to assist you to master the right techniques.

If you have any concern whatsoever that you are not coping, or if you have an inkling that you just don’t feel right, then ask for help. You can start with your GP and if needed, they can refer you to specialists to advise on particular issues, including mental health.

No matter what you are feeling, please do not judge yourself or downplay your emotions and situation. Ask your doctor for help. The best-case scenario is that you discover that you are coping well. The even better outcome is that if you need medical help, you have made the first step and will get what you need to get on the path to recovery.

## **6. Counselling Support**

Many people I have talked to credit counselling as a key factor in their recovery. You may have a friend who is your mentor or confidante, or you may prefer a professionally trained counsellor who offers a totally safe place to speak openly without any fear of repercussions or hurt feelings.

Finding a counsellor can sometimes be challenging. I have had people say to me that they have tried therapy, but it didn’t work for them. Once I delve further, I usually find that they only went once, to one psychologist and because they did not connect with that person, they decided that the entire profession did not work!

You may need to see a few different counsellors to find the right one. Please keep searching until you find them.

## **7. Information and Resources**

An internet search brings a plethora of information on whatever subject you wish to learn about. When you add in social media sources, there are

many different voices sharing their opinion as fact. As you seek knowledge, look for credible sources from reputable support organisations.

Opinions and ideas are wonderful but not all of them may work for you. Before trying something new, it's always a good idea to talk to your GP, midwife or obstetrician to discuss your options.

## **8. Good Habits**

There are many things you can do to help yourself heal from any trauma. I have tried all of these things personally as have the many people I have interviewed. These are all practices you can implement to calm your mind, body and spirit.

### **Mindfulness**

This is the practice of being present, bringing your mind and full attention to what you are experiencing in this moment.

Living in a mindful way does not mean that stress and difficulties are eliminated, but what it does help us do is to become aware of our unpleasant thoughts and emotions and this allows us to be more conscious about how we handle them in the moment.

### **Meditation**

Meditation is a technique to train and cultivate our minds in order to increase our happiness, focus, compassion and wellness.

There are many different types of meditation. Some are guided, some include mantras, others use music. You can find books on the subject and there is also a huge range of apps available. Try different ones and see what suits you.

### **Journaling**

There is something both therapeutic and tangible about writing things down. A personal journal can be a private place to write down whatever you experience and feel without fear or filter. Let your thoughts flow freely onto the page.

Journaling can help you to process the overwhelm of thoughts, worries and emotions that can swamp you through life's difficulties.

You might have heard about the benefits of keeping a gratitude journal, writing down something you are grateful for each day. When you remind yourself of the good things you already have, it shifts your mindset.

### **Helping Others**

Many people have used their personal experience as the impetus to help others who are struggling with the same traumas. My personal experiences are the reason why I have started on my mission to offer light, hope and help to those suffering from trauma.

The act of contribution to others is as rewarding for the giver as it is for the receiver. You could offer support to friend who has experienced pregnancy difficulties. You could provide friendship as a peer mentor through a support network, group or online group. Every act of kindness counts.

## FOR PARTNERS

**T**here is much evidence to show that men and women grieve differently. If your partner is experiencing difficulties in pregnancy or loss, she may be distressed or upset and worried about what's to come. She may turn inwards and feel that she does not want to talk, or she may want to express everything she is feeling.

What can you do?

### **1. Take Your Cues from Her**

If she wants to talk, be there and listen. This is no time to offer solutions or platitudes. Don't say things like, "It wasn't meant to be," or "At least we already have kids," or "It's not the end of the world." We often say these types of things when we don't know what else to say. They are general sayings that just roll off the tongue and show a lack of thought and understanding of her personal situation.

### **2. Listen without Judgement**

She does not need suggestions or criticism, she just needs to know that you hear her and that you love her.

Be there when she needs you and show that you mean it by being reliable and dependable with the smallest task. Show some initiative and help out

with the household chores such as cleaning and washing, without expecting acknowledgement or appreciation. She might not say it, but she will notice and be grateful that you have taken care of these things.

### **3. Time**

There is no time limit on how long she may be sad or grieve and even though you might wish she would get over it, saying that or acting impatient or intolerant will have the opposite effect. Give her the time she needs, a listening ear anytime she wants to talk, even if she says the same things she has said before.

### **4. Seeking Help**

If you feel that she is not coping well and needs help, offer to facilitate an appointment with your GP to check on her physical and mental wellbeing. Connect with a local support group and go together to network with others who have first-hand experience on moving forward from similar trauma.

### **5. Self-Care**

As a partner, you also may be hurting. Men can find themselves in the strange position of experiencing a new kind of pain and grief, with no resources to cope with these unexpected emotions.

Society is changing but many men have been raised to bottle-up their feelings, that showing emotion is displaying weakness. Men can feel that they are meant to be tough and self-sufficient. Sharing thoughts on coping with difficulties can be too exposing.

Partners need emotional support and sometimes the best way to do this is to speak to other partners of women who have experienced pregnancy difficulties and loss.

Know that your feelings are valid and that there is professional help available. See your GP as a first step, and feel free to access resources from support organisations.

Processing your own emotions is as crucial as supporting your partner. In the same way that it is essential to put on your own oxygen mask before helping others if you are on a crashing plane, so too is it vital to ensure your own mental wellbeing in order to best support your partner.

## FOR FRIENDS AND FAMILY

**H**ow do you help a friend or family member through pregnancy or infant loss? You may not have known she was pregnant. You may have heard of her miscarriage through someone else. Should you address the subject or wait for her to say something? What are some tangible ways you can offer practical support? What is the best way to give emotional support?

Knowing what to say to a friend or family member who has experienced trauma and loss is perhaps the most difficult social interaction there is. We feel so much anxiety about saying the right thing because we don't want to say the wrong thing and cause more hurt to someone who is already traumatised. Here are some tips:

### **What to Say**

Words have different connotations to different people and your choice of words said to soothe and calm your friend or loved one may be perceived as insensitive. Here is a list of some words that women experiencing pregnancy and infant loss have found to be inappropriate:

“I know just how you feel.”

“It's a blessing in disguise.”

“You've got to read/watch/listen to this. That's what I did when it happened to me.”

“You can always have another one.”

“It must be God’s will.”

“Just as well it happened now rather than later.”

“It wasn’t meant to be.”

“At least you know you can get pregnant.”

“It wasn’t a real baby yet.”

“Lots of people have miscarriages, they’re common.”

“There was obviously something wrong with it.”

“You wouldn’t want to have a disabled child.”

“Aren’t you lucky that you already have children.”

There are no words that can make her feel better or that will take her pain away. The best thing you can do is to acknowledge her loss. Most women I talked to agreed that a short expression of your understanding is all that is needed. Simple words such as:

“I’m sorry for your loss.”

“I’m sorry you are going through this”

“I know how much this meant to you.”

“I’m so sorry this happened.”

“I’m here for you.”

The most important thing you can do is not to talk, but to listen. If she does not want to talk, make sure she knows that you are there when she is ready to do so. Take the time to check in with a message to let her know you are thinking of her.

### **What to Do**

Is there anything you can do to ease your friend or family member’s pain? Take your cues from her. Offer your support and assistance and let her know you are available to help with practical tasks. Here are some suggestions:

- Offer your time, your presence and a listening ear
- Drop in a home-cooked meal
- Help with transport to and from activities for other children
- Provide transport to medical appointments
- Do errands and grocery shopping
- Provide babysitting for other children

She may not respond to your messages or offers and may feel withdrawn. Give her space but check in at intervals to see if her needs have changed and to make sure she knows of your genuine care and unwavering support.

The most important thing you can do is to be there. To provide meaningful support, you need to offer comfort, and real empathy. It's about showing respect and genuine understanding, assuring them of your unconditional love.

## OTHER BOOKS IN THE SURVIVE-REVIVE-THRIVE SERIES

**These books and the free resources are available at:  
[www.brightbutterfly.com.au](http://www.brightbutterfly.com.au)**



### ***Survive and Thrive: How Cancer Saves Lives.***

A book filled with the stories of 30 cancer survivors aged from 3 to 76 years of age. Learn from their first-hand knowledge on how they coped with all different types of cancers including breast, lung, prostate and lymphoma.

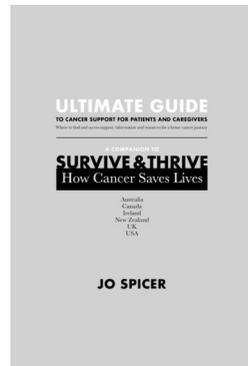
Includes chapters dealing with diagnosis and treatments well as survivorship. Offers practical help for caregivers, family and friends, plus information on where to find seek support.

**Get it here: *Survive and Thrive: How Cancer Saves Lives***

### ***Ultimate Guide to Cancer Support for Patients and Caregivers***

Everything you need for a better cancer journey. Includes **My Cancer Journey Workbook** to help you every step of the way through your treatment.

There's also a comprehensive directory of support organisations for patients, carers and their families. An essential resource for every cancer patient.



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### ***My Cancer Journey Workbook***

A step-by-step guide to record every appointment, consultation and medication prescribed in your treatment protocol.

Now there's no need to remember dates of tests and results. Note it in your Workbook and keep all your vital information in the one place for easy reference.

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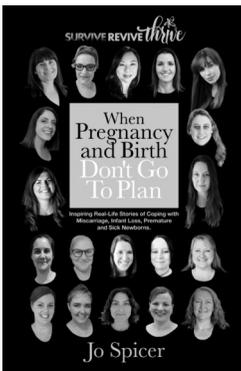
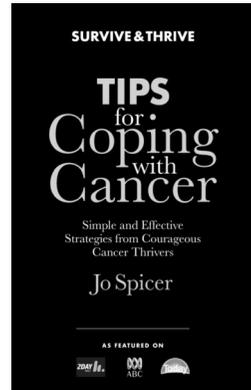
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### ***Top Tips for Coping with Cancer***

An easy, short read outlining useful tips for anyone affected by cancer. Perfect for women, their partners, family and friends, discover the secrets to surviving and moving forward.

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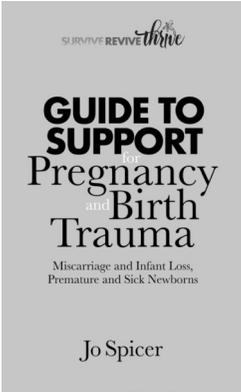


### ***When Pregnancy and Birth Don't Go To Plan***

Stories from brave women who have overcome pregnancy and infant loss, and the emotional trauma of premature and sick newborns.

Find the help you need to from their personal experiences of recovering from loss, anxiety and postnatal depression. Tips for partners and families on supporting their loved ones.

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***Guide to Support for Pregnancy and Birth Trauma***

Need support to deal with pregnancy and infant loss? Help to cope with premature or sick newborns? Are you suffering from postnatal depression or anxiety. Find the assistance and resources you need in this comprehensive directory of support groups and organisations.

**Get it FREE here: [Guide to Support for Pregnancy and Birth Trauma](#)**

## **ENJOY THIS BOOK?**

Would you like to help the millions of people and their families affected by pregnancy and birth trauma?

By spreading the word about these books, more people will get the support they need to navigate a recovery to wellness. You can find more resources here: [Bright Butterfly](#)

A great way you can assist is through honest reviews. This simple act will bring this book to the attention of those need the knowledge most.

I would be grateful if you could leave a quick review at your favourite bookseller here: [Review](#). It can be as short as you like and your efforts are much appreciated.



## ABOUT THE AUTHOR



**Jo Spicer** is an author, speaker and advocate who uses her own lived experience to help others overcome the devastating effects of trauma. A survivor of two cancers, the traumatic pregnancy and births of her two children, debilitating migraines, financial crisis, two divorces and PTSD, Jo had to find ways to deal with both physical and emotional wounds.

Through her personal journey and her research with other survivors, Jo has discovered the secrets to processing and overcoming trauma. She has developed strategies that resonate strongly with others. She has learnt to thrive and now lives with the purpose of helping those who are struggling, offering practical guidance and real hope to light their way forward.

Jo is the Co-Founder of Bright Butterfly with her sister Kerri, an award-winning calligrapher and designer. Bright Butterfly is a platform connecting you to inspiration for the body, mind and soul with books and resources to calm your mind, an Artisan handmade collection to soothe your body, and beautiful quote art and cards to uplift your soul. Find it all here at:

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