

Miscarriage misunderstood, often leaves women with guilt

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Survey finds many think it is less common than it is, don't understand it is usually unavoidable.

(HealthDay)—Misconceptions about miscarriages are common, and those mistaken beliefs can make the experience even more painful for those who suffer through it, a new survey reveals.

More than half of the 1,000 adults who responded to the survey incorrectly believed [miscarriages](#) are rare, and many thought they could occur for reasons that actually don't affect miscarriage risk at all.

In reality, miscarriages are not that uncommon, yet almost half of those women who have suffered a miscarriage have felt guilt and a sense of isolation about what happened, the researchers said.

"A striking finding from the study is the discrepancy between what medicine and science teach us about miscarriage and what people believe," said study co-author Dr. Zev Williams, a professor of obstetrics and gynecology at Albert Einstein College of Medicine and Montefiore Medical Center in New York City.

"Miscarriage seems to be unique in medicine in being very common yet rarely discussed, so that you have many women and couples feeling very isolated and alone," Williams said.

Another expert was also disturbed by the findings.

"I was surprised to learn how much false information our patients have, and how this information led the patients in the study to feelings of guilt and remorse," said Dr. Iris Dori, medical director at the Center for Women's Health at Staten Island University Hospital in New York City.

Among the respondents—roughly half women and half men—15 percent reported that they or their partner had experienced at least one miscarriage.

But over half of the respondents believed miscarriages occur in less than 6 percent of all pregnancies. Men were more than twice as likely as women to think miscarriages were rare, the survey found.

Most of the adults (74 percent) correctly believed that genetic or medical problems most often caused miscarriages, but they also incorrectly believed in other causes, the investigators found.

For example, 76 percent believed a stressful event could cause miscarriage, and 74 percent believed ongoing stress could cause one. In addition, 64 percent thought lifting heavy objects could cause miscarriages, but neither stress nor lifting causes pregnancy loss, the

researchers said.

Other things that do not cause miscarriage include past [sexually transmitted infections](#), past abortions, past use of an intrauterine device (IUD) for birth control or previously using other [birth control](#), getting into an argument or not wanting the pregnancy. Yet, more than one in five respondents thought at least one of these could cause miscarriage.

The findings were released online May 7 and published in the June print issue of *Obstetrics and Gynecology*.

"Most patients have access to the Internet and social media, and they are getting their medical information from unreliable sources," Dori said. "They really should be speaking to their doctor and family members who have had experience with miscarriage, and try to stay away from sources that might be unreliable."

Among those who had a past miscarriage, almost half said they felt guilty, 41 percent said they felt they did something wrong, 41 percent felt alone and 28 percent felt ashamed. More than one-third thought they could have prevented their miscarriage.

But that is rarely the case, Dori said.

"Most miscarriages are a result of genetic abnormalities in the pregnancy," she explained. "We don't completely understand the triggers of miscarriage, but the majority of miscarriages are unavoidable."

The survey also revealed what helps in coping with a loss.

"As is so often the case, knowledge can be very powerful," Williams said. "In our study, when family, friends, public figures or celebrities revealed their miscarriage experiences, it helped reduce the feelings of

isolation. Acknowledging the emotional pain of the miscarriage and not dismissing it would also be helpful," he added.

Understanding why miscarriages happen helped, too, the survey found.

"Finding a cause for a miscarriage, even if there was nothing that could have been done to prevent it, was found to be highly desirable by the respondents," Williams said. "Combining empathy with the rigor of scientific exploration could help lessen both the stigma and the incidence of miscarriage."

More information: Visit the [American Congress of Obstetricians and Gynecologists](#) for more about miscarriage.

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