

## Pregnancy - bleeding problems

Bleeding from the vagina in early pregnancy is very common. In fact, it is thought to happen in almost one in every four pregnancies. The medical term for this is a threatened miscarriage.

### Cause of bleeding problems

It is not always possible to pinpoint why a woman is bleeding. One cause for bleeding in early pregnancy is an 'implantation bleed'. This happens when the pregnancy implants (buries) itself into the lining of the uterus (womb). The bleeding will often last a few days then stop.

About a third to half of all women who have bleeding will go on to miscarry. A miscarriage is the loss of a pregnancy before the fetus (unborn baby) can survive outside the womb. Miscarriage usually occurs in the first 12 weeks of the pregnancy. Most miscarriages occur without a clear cause. The development of a baby is a very complex process. If something goes wrong with the process, the pregnancy will fail.

### Tests for bleeding problems

It can take some time for the doctor to be sure of what the bleeding means. You may require a number of tests that could include:

- **Vaginal examination** – to check the size of your uterus and the amount of bleeding. This examination lasts a few minutes and may be a bit uncomfortable.
- **Blood tests** – to check your blood type and, sometimes, the amount of pregnancy hormones in the blood.
- **Ultrasound scan** – gel is rubbed on your abdomen. A hand-held scanner uses sound waves to provide pictures of the pregnancy. In very early pregnancy, more information is gained by placing a small slender scanner in the vagina. You will need to have a full bladder before the scan. An ultrasound scan takes around 15 to 20 minutes. If an ultrasound is needed, it can be arranged through the emergency department of your nearest hospital or your local doctor. Most women are eager to know very quickly what is happening. However, there is usually no urgency for the ultrasound and it may be done in the days ahead.

### Treatment cannot prevent miscarriage

The bleeding may be light and stop in a day or two. Many people go on to have a healthy baby at full term. However, sometimes the bleeding becomes heavy and a miscarriage is likely to happen. While you still need to see a doctor, there is no emergency care that will save your pregnancy.

Sometimes, during a miscarriage, some of the pregnancy tissue may remain inside and this can lead to very heavy bleeding if it is not treated. Your doctor will tell you if you need further treatment.

If you are Rhesus (Rh) negative, you may require an injection of anti-D immunoglobulin or Rho gam to prevent problems with the Rh factor in future pregnancies.

### Taking care of yourself at home

You may feel a range of emotions over this time. Guilt is a normal feeling, but don't blame yourself, as you have done nothing wrong. Your body will be going through changes in hormone levels and this can make you feel very emotional. It may help to talk to family or friends.

While there is no specific treatment to prevent a miscarriage, general measures that may help include:

- Get plenty of rest.
- Use pads rather than tampons while you are bleeding.
- Avoid sex while you are bleeding. Sex can resume once the bleeding has stopped.
- Take mild painkillers, such as paracetamol, if needed.
- Report any changes in your condition to your doctor.

If you are finding your mood remains low for an extended period of time, you may be experiencing depression and require the assistance of a professional.

## Where to get help

- Your doctor
- Obstetrician
- Family Planning Victoria Tel. (03) 9257 0100 or 1800 013 952
- PANDA Helpline Tel. 1300 726 306

## Things to remember

- Bleeding from the vagina in early pregnancy happens in almost one in four pregnancies.
- About a third to half of all women who have bleeding while pregnant will go on to miscarry.
- If you are having a miscarriage, there is no emergency care that will save your pregnancy.

**This page has been produced in consultation with, and approved by:**

Department of Health - Maternity & Newborn Clinical Network (MNCN)

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