

# MISCARRIAGE

## (Spontaneous Abortion)



### BASIC INFORMATION

#### DESCRIPTION

When a pregnancy fails to grow, either because no embryo is formed (blighted ovum) or embryonic growth is established, but no cardiac activity is seen on ultrasound, a spontaneous abortion has occurred. Loss of a pregnancy prior to the 20th week is generally considered a miscarriage. It happens in about 20 to 30% of first pregnancies, and frequently occurs so early that the woman is unaware that she is pregnant.

#### FREQUENT SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

- Uterine cramps.
- Vaginal bleeding from slight to heavy.
- Many miscarriages are only "threatened," and the pregnancy continues to term. Symptoms may be the same for threatened miscarriages as for those in progress.

#### CAUSES

During the first trimester (first 12 weeks of pregnancy):

- Genetic (chromosome [such as Down syndrome]) or structural abnormalities of the fetus.
- Uterine abnormalities that prevent the fertilized egg from growing normally.
- Smoking.

During the second trimester (13 to 28 weeks):

- Uterine abnormalities that cause detachment of the fetus and placenta.
- Severe stress (nutritional; psychological).

Anytime:

- Use of substances that harm the fetus (cocaine, smoking).
- Infections, especially viral infections (rubella or influenza).
- Trauma or severe medical conditions (diabetes mellitus, hypertension).

#### RISK INCREASES WITH

- Stress.
- Smoking.
- Poor nutrition.
- Illness that lowers resistance.
- Recent serious infection.
- Medical history of endocrine diseases, such as diabetes mellitus or hypothyroidism.

#### PREVENTIVE MEASURES

During pregnancy:

- Obtain regular medical checkups.
- Eat a normal, well balanced diet.
- Don't drink alcohol, smoke cigarettes or use recreational drugs.
- Don't use any medications, including nonprescription drugs, without medical advice.

#### EXPECTED OUTCOME

- With treatment, a miscarriage is not a life-threatening condition. It does not affect a woman's ability to carry a healthy baby to term in the future.
- Feelings of loss and grief are common. Feelings of guilt may also be present. If these persist, seek professional psychological help.

#### POSSIBLE COMPLICATIONS

- Uterine infection, signaled by fever, chills and aching.

- Hemorrhaging from other body parts.
- "Incomplete" abortion, in which some placenta or fetal tissue remains in the uterus, or missed abortion, in which the fetus dies but remains in the uterus.



### TREATMENT

#### GENERAL MEASURES

- Ultrasound examination and laboratory blood studies may be needed for diagnosis. If a fetal heartbeat can be seen, this means that there is a 95 % chance that the pregnancy will proceed normally. When the ultrasound scan shows certain problems or abnormalities with the fetus, then nothing can be done to save the pregnancy.
- For a threatened miscarriage, follow your obstetric provider's orders. Bed rest at home is often enough to stabilize the pregnancy. Bleeding is occasionally severe, requiring hospitalization and blood transfusion as indicated.
- Following a miscarriage:
  - Expect a small amount of vaginal bleeding or spotting for 8 to 10 days. Don't use tampons for 2 to 4 weeks.
  - Wait through 2 or 3 normal menstrual cycles before attempting to become pregnant.
- Surgery (D & C--dilatation and curettage, or D & E--dilatation and evacuation) may be needed to remove any remaining tissue or a dead fetus.
- Psychotherapy or grief counseling for the patient and her partner may be helpful.

#### MEDICATION

- For a threatened miscarriage: Medicine usually is not necessary. Don't take any medication without medical advice.
- Oxytocin to control bleeding in some patients.
- Pain medication may be prescribed.
- After a miscarriage, antibiotics may be prescribed to fight infection.
- Blood transfusions for severe blood loss.
- An Rh-negative female may be given RhoD (immune globulin).

#### ACTIVITY

- For a threatened miscarriage: Rest in bed until symptoms disappear. Avoid sexual intercourse until the outcome is known.
- After a miscarriage: Reduce activity and rest often during the next 48 hours.

#### DIET

- For a threatened miscarriage: Drink fluids only, if bleeding and cramping are severe.
- After a miscarriage: No special diet.



### NOTIFY OUR OFFICE IF

- Vaginal bleeding occurs during pregnancy.
- Bleeding and cramps worsen during a threatened miscarriage or you pass tissue.
- Fever and chills occur during a threatened miscarriage or following a miscarriage.
- Bleeding (other than vaginal) or unexplained bruising occurs after a miscarriage.
- Infection develops while you are pregnant.