

BLEEDING DURING EARLY PREGNANCY



PregnancyED.com

I'm experiencing bleeding during pregnancy, what does this mean?

There are many causes of vaginal bleeding during early pregnancy (first trimester). Roughly 50% of all pregnancies will have some amount of bleeding during this time. Sometimes bleeding is a sign of a miscarriage but often it is not.

Common causes can include:

1. **Implantation bleeding:** this is usually light bleeding or spotting that can happen when the fertilized egg implants in the uterus.
2. **Subchorionic hemorrhage (or hematoma):** this occurs when blood collects under one of the membranes (chorion) surrounding the embryo in the uterus. This is generally not dangerous to your pregnancy and usually resolves on its own.
3. **Cervical bleeding:** The cervix may bleed more during pregnancy as blood vessels are developing in this area. It is possible to have cervical bleeding after sex, a pap test, or a pelvic exam.
4. **Cervical polyp:** This is a usually benign growth on the cervix that can bleed.
5. **Infection:** such as urinary tract infection (UTI), sexually transmitted infections (STIs), or yeast infections.
6. **Ectopic pregnancy:** An ectopic pregnancy happens when the embryo implants outside of the uterus. The most common location is inside one of the fallopian tubes. If it grows in the fallopian tube, it can cause the tube to burst (rupture). An embryo cannot grow normally outside of the uterus and so these pregnancies will not be successful.
7. **Early pregnancy loss:** also referred to as a miscarriage, is the loss of pregnancy during the first 13 weeks of pregnancy (first trimester).

When should I seek medical attention?

If you are experiencing vaginal bleeding or abdominal pain/cramping, you should seek medical attention. You should contact your family physician, midwife, or obstetrician.

If none of these options are available to you in the next one to three days, you should go to your local emergency department.

RED FLAGS

You should go to the emergency department immediately if you:

- Suddenly have severe pain in your abdomen that is not going away or lessened by with acetaminophen (Tylenol)
- Suddenly feel faint or like you are passing out
- Have very heavy bleeding (soaking more than three pads in three hours)
- Have chills or a fever higher than 38°C (100.4°F)

How do I find out the cause of my vaginal bleeding?

- An ultrasound (a medical scan) may be ordered. This will help determine where the pregnancy is (inside the uterus or not), if it is developing as normal and if there is a subchorionic hemorrhage. However, ultrasounds are not always able to identify the cause of the bleeding.
- In some cases a pelvic exam may be performed with a speculum. This allows the healthcare provider to see the cervix to determine if there is a polyp or if it is open which may signal an early pregnancy loss. Your healthcare provider may use swabs to check for an infection.
- A blood test (beta-hCG) may also be performed which can help determine if a pregnancy is developing as expected.

What should I expect if I have a subchorionic hemorrhage?

In the vast majority of cases, these resolve on their own, and people go on to have healthy pregnancies. Because these bleeds or clots can rarely cause problems, they should be monitored by your family physician, your obstetrical care provider or an early pregnancy clinic.

It is usually recommended that you refrain from vigorous exercise (ie. running) or sexual intercourse until after the visible bleeding has resolved.

Will vaginal bleeding affect my pregnancy?

Vaginal bleeding due to causes other than early pregnancy loss and ectopic pregnancies is likely to resolve on its own over a few days to 1 week.

If the bleeding does not stop or worsens, this would be a reason to speak with your family doctor, midwife or obstetrician.

Generally, most causes apart from early pregnancy loss and ectopic pregnancies, will not affect your pregnancy and most pregnancies go on to develop as normal.

Depending on the cause, your healthcare professional may monitor this through your regularly scheduled pregnancy ultrasounds.

What are the next steps?

In the vast majority of cases where a non-threatening cause of bleeding has been identified, these resolve on their own, and people go on to have healthy pregnancies. Because bleeding can be an indication of a problem, follow-up care should take place with your family physician, your obstetrical care provider or an early pregnancy clinic until the bleeding subsides.

It is usually recommended that you refrain from vigorous exercise (ie. running) or sexual intercourse until after the visible bleeding has resolved.