

Patient information leaflet

Bleeding & abdominal pain in early pregnancy

You may have experienced vaginal bleeding or abdominal pain in the early part of your pregnancy which has resulted in you attending the Emergency Department or Emergency Gynaecology Assessment Unit (EGAU). This leaflet is designed to give you information about the symptoms you have experienced and what happens next.

You were assessed as being safe to discharge home and a follow-up appointment in the Early Pregnancy Unit (EPU) may have been arranged for you. A staff member will have informed you of the details of this appointment before you were discharged. If you have any early pregnancy pain or bleeding, please **only** attend the Grange University Hospital (GUH). All follow-up reviews or appointments will also be in this hospital.

Bleeding during early pregnancy:

Bleeding or spotting in early pregnancy can be common; around 1 in 4 women will experience this. Bleeding is not necessarily a sign of miscarriage. In some cases we do not know why bleeding occurs, however below is a list of potential causes.

1. Vaginal infections

Blood loss can be caused due to inflammation within the vagina from infections such as 'Thrush'

2. Cervix (neck of the womb)

In pregnancy the blood supply to the cervix increases. Slight trauma (e.g. through intercourse) can cause bleeding. Please inform us if you have had any abnormalities during your smear testing or results previously

3. Implantation site

As the pregnancy attaches to the endometrium (lining of the womb) this may cause blood vessels of the uterus (womb) to bleed

4. Haematoma

Bleeding around the pregnancy sac can cause a collection of blood to form (like a bruise). This can vary in size and can sometimes be noted during an ultrasound scan. This blood can be gradually reabsorbed or come away as vaginal bleeding.

Abdominal pain during pregnancy:

Pain in the lower abdomen and pelvic region can be experienced commonly in early pregnancy for a number of reasons.

Pain is not necessarily a sign of miscarriage or ectopic pregnancy (pregnancy developing outside of the womb). Below is a list of potential causes of pain:

1. Musculoskeletal pain

Progesterone is a hormone that supports the early pregnancy to continue. This hormone has a relaxing-type effect on the muscles and ligaments, including those that support the womb. This can cause sometimes quite severe stitch-like pain and so called 'growing pains' as the womb enlarges

2. Constipation

Pain can be associated to the bowel. Constipation is more common in pregnancy again due to hormonal changes

3. Urine infection

Urine infections are more common in pregnancy and can present with pain. Please inform the doctor/nurse reviewing you if you experienced any other symptoms such as a burning sensation when passing urine.

4. Ectopic pregnancy

An ectopic pregnancy is a pregnancy that is developing outside of the womb. This can occur in around 1 in 90 pregnancies. An ectopic pregnancy cannot continue to full-term and may need intervention medically or surgically. The most common location for an ectopic pregnancy to implant is within the fallopian tube. As the pregnancy grows larger, this can cause pain including severe pain if the pregnancy grows large enough to cause the fallopian tube to rupture. A suspected rupture is an emergency which requires urgent review by a Gynaecology doctor

What will happen when I attend the EPU:

The EPU nurse will initially see you to confirm your details and ask you a few questions about your symptoms. You may be asked to produce a urine sample which will be checked for infection and confirm whether a pregnancy test is positive.

You will then wait to see the Sonographer who will undertake an ultrasound scan to assess the pregnancy. The Sonographer will have a chaperone with them. They will perform a scan on your abdomen (with a full bladder) and will ask your consent to undertake a scan from within the vagina. If you do not wish for the internal vaginal scan to be performed please let the Sonographer know. It may however make diagnosis more challenging.

A Gynaecology doctor will then see you to discuss the ultrasound scan findings in correlation with your symptoms. They may suggest that you need further investigations such as blood tests or follow-up ultrasound scans, or you may be suitable for discharge.

Self-help advice and advice on keeping healthy:

Commence Folic acid and pregnancy vitamins if you have not done so already.

Stop smoking. This can affect both you and your growing baby. Encourage other household members to also stop smoking as this can affect you too. There are a variety of resources available to help you with this including a recommended website listed below. Your Midwife can also refer you to Smoking Cessation Wales.

Continue with your normal daily activities as much as possible. Try and eat a healthy, balanced diet and avoid alcohol and excess caffeine. There are resources available to advise on diet in pregnancy, please see websites listed below.

Having sexual intercourse during pregnancy is generally safe. However, if you have symptoms of pain or bleeding it would be sensible to avoid this whilst you have these symptoms.

If you are experiencing vaginal bleeding it would be advisable to wear a sanitary pad or liner rather than a tampon.

Please attend the appointments or follow-up made for you.

If you develop the following symptoms, you should seek medical assistance urgently in the Grange University Hospital:

- Dizziness or fainting
- Heavy vaginal bleeding (like a heavy period)
- Worsening abdominal pain
- Pain going up into the shoulders
- Diarrhoea and vomiting (with pain or bleeding in early pregnancy)

If you are concerned about your condition please contact the Emergency Gynaecology Assessment Unit (EGAU) in the Grange University Hospital (GUH) who can provide phone advice or suggest the safest place for you to go to be assessed.

Useful phone numbers:

Emergency Gynaecology Assessment Unit (24hrs)

Grange University Hospital: 01633 493557/6

For appointment queries:

Grange University Hospital Early Pregnancy Unit (EPU): 01633 493984

Internet resources:

<https://www.rcog.org.uk/en/patients/patient-leaflets/bleeding-and-pain-in-early-pregnancy>

<https://www.rcog.org.uk/globalassets/documents/patients/patient-information-leaflets/pregnancy/pi-bleeding-pain-early-pregnancy-mar20.pdf>

<https://www.nhs.uk/better-health/quit-smoking>

<https://www.nhs.uk/start4life/pregnancy/healthy-eating-pregnancy>

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/pregnancy-and-baby/foods-to-avoid-pregnant>

**“This document is available in Welsh /
Mae’r ddogfen hon ar gael yn Gymraeg”.**