

# Pain and bleeding in early pregnancy

This information sheet aims to answer some commonly asked questions about pain and bleeding in early pregnancy

**IMPORTANT:** This is general information only. Ask your doctor, midwife or nurse about what care is right for you.

## Why are you bleeding?

Pain and vaginal bleeding in early pregnancy are common and it does not always mean that there is a problem. Most women will continue their pregnancy and give birth at term without further problems. However, it can mean that you are having a miscarriage or that there is a problem with your pregnancy. If you have pain or bleeding, go to your local doctor or to the hospital so that you get the care you need.

## What is a miscarriage?

A miscarriage is the loss of a baby before the 20th week of pregnancy. Most miscarriages happen before the 12th week of pregnancy. Some women have a miscarriage before they know they're pregnant. The cause of a miscarriage is often not known. If your healthcare provider tells you that your pregnancy will not be able to continue, you may like to read Queensland Clinical Guidelines information sheet *Having a miscarriage*.

## What is a threatened miscarriage?

A threatened miscarriage is when you have vaginal bleeding, but your pregnancy seems to be otherwise healthy. At first it can be hard to know if your pregnancy is continuing normally or if you are having a miscarriage. To help work this out, your healthcare provider will ask you about your bleeding and pain and recommend some tests.

Usually these will be:

- a vaginal examination
- blood tests for pregnancy hormones (beta hCG) - usually at least two tests a few days apart
- an ultrasound scan

## What do the blood test results mean?

When you are pregnant, your body makes a pregnancy hormone (beta hCG) and this can be measured in your blood. If your blood test levels are too low, going down, or not going up, you may have a pregnancy that is not progressing normally. More than one blood test is needed to see how the levels are changing.

## What can an ultrasound scan show?

An ultrasound scan shows a picture of what is happening in your uterus. The scan may show your baby is developing normally or that your baby has died, and that you are having a miscarriage. It can also show if the pregnancy is an ectopic pregnancy. Sometimes, more than one scan is needed, especially early on in your pregnancy.

If the ultrasound shows the pregnancy is developing outside of your uterus, this is called an ectopic pregnancy. You will usually need treatment for this. You might like to read the Queensland Clinical Guidelines information sheet *Ectopic pregnancy*.

## How is an ultrasound scan done?

There are two ways to do an ultrasound scan in early pregnancy and both are safe for you and your baby. Either a probe is placed on the outside of your lower abdomen (transabdominal) or a probe is placed into your vagina (transvaginal). An ultrasound through the vagina gives a better picture in early pregnancy when the developing baby is very small and hard to see.



Image: two people holding hands



## What happens next?

In many cases, your bleeding will settle after a few days. Sometimes no reason is found for the bleeding. There is no specific treatment to stop your bleeding. Your healthcare provider will talk with you about whether or not you need another scan or blood test.

If you have more spotting or smearing of blood later on in your pregnancy, you don't usually need another scan. If you soak a pad in under an hour, go to your nearest emergency department.

## Should you rest?

Resting in bed is not necessary and won't change the outcome. Avoid heavy lifting, manual labour or strenuous exercise. You can otherwise do your everyday activities (e.g. go to work) if you feel able to.

## Can you have sex?

The usual recommendation is to wait for one week after your bleeding has completely stopped before having sex again. You can then have sex whenever you feel ready. Sex during pregnancy does not cause any harm to your baby. Avoid using tampons, going swimming or bathing while you are bleeding. Showering is ok.

## Your feelings

You may feel tearful, sad, anxious, guilty or relieved. These feelings are all normal and there is no 'right' way to feel. Talking about your feelings with family and close friends may be helpful. If you feel that you need support, or you are struggling to cope, you might want to talk with your healthcare provider or a counsellor or contact one of the groups listed below.

## Support & information

**Queensland Clinical Guidelines** Information for parents and families [www.health.qld.gov.au/qcg](http://www.health.qld.gov.au/qcg)

**13HEALTH** (13 432584) health information, referral and services to the public by phone.

**Pregnancy, Birth & Baby Helpline** 1800 882 436 (free call) information and counselling on conception, pregnancy, birthing and postnatal care. [www.health.gov.au/pregnancyhelpline](http://www.health.gov.au/pregnancyhelpline)

**SANDS** (1300 308 307) support and information on miscarriage, stillbirth and neonatal and infant death [www.sands.org.au](http://www.sands.org.au)

**Bears of Hope (1300 11 2327)** support and care after the loss of a baby [www.bearsofhope.org.au](http://www.bearsofhope.org.au)

**Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages (Queensland)** (1300 366 430) offers a free early pregnancy loss recognition certificate on application [www.qld.gov.au/law/births-deaths-marriages-and-divorces/](http://www.qld.gov.au/law/births-deaths-marriages-and-divorces/)

**Lifeline 13 11 14** a telephone crisis support service. [www.lifeline.org.au](http://www.lifeline.org.au)

**The Pink Elephants Support Network** support through miscarriage and pregnancy loss [www.miscarriagesupport.org.au](http://www.miscarriagesupport.org.au)

**Pregnancy Counselling Link (PCL)** a community agency staffed by tertiary qualified, professional counsellors, who support women in the areas of pregnancy, parenting, relationships, navigating life changes, fertility issues, and loss and grief. Support is also available for partners and other family members. [www.pcl.org.au](http://www.pcl.org.au)