

## **DO YOU THINK I MIGHT MISCARRY? WHAT DO I DO IF I START BLEEDING?**

### **Why does it happen?**

About one out of every six pregnant women has a miscarriage (also called a spontaneous abortion). Usually this happens because the pregnancy is not growing or developing properly. There usually is nothing you can do to prevent this kind of miscarriage and there is nothing you did wrong. There are a few rare (conditions) such as a subchorionic haematoma (a blood clot under the placenta) or an incompetent cervix (where the cervix gradually opens too early) that may be treated successfully with bed rest. Most of the time, it doesn't matter what you do; you cannot stop a miscarriage.

### **What are warning signs?**

The first sign of a miscarriage is bleeding, with cramps. In some pregnancies, women can have some light bleeding and mild cramps without any need to worry, so try not

to panic if this happens to you. You probably don't need to go to bed or go to the Emergency, but take it easy until you can talk to your doctor within a few days. Usually we suggest that you avoid heavy work and do not have sex until you can be assessed but there is no science to show this is helpful. After an examination and possibly an ultrasound, you will find out one of three things from the doctor:

- You may have a growing pregnancy and may go back to your usual activities.
- You may have one of the rare conditions that need bed rest and special treatment.
- You may be having a miscarriage.

Unfortunately, more testing may be needed to figure out which of the above is your situation, such as repeating tests in 1-2 weeks.

**If you are bleeding too heavily, much more than a normal period, have severe cramps that you can't cope with, or you are feeling faint or blacking out, you should go to the emergency department of your closest hospital, right away.**

### **What can I do?**

If you are miscarrying because the pregnancy is not growing properly, there is nothing you can do to stop it. Miscarriage is a natural process of the body and is rarely dangerous. In most women the process will start with a little bleeding and she may have mild cramps. This bleeding will get heavier than a period and the cramps may become very strong. Using a hot water bottle may help manage the cramps.

You may take acetaminophen (Tylenol) or ibuprofen (Advil) for the pain, or your doctor may prescribe a stronger pain medicine. The bleeding may include big, dark red blood clots and possibly some pregnancy tissue. This usually looks beige or grey, not red. Once the pregnancy tissue has passed, the cramps will usually go away and you will feel better. After that, you will bleed like a normal period. Your next period may be a little late but should return within 6 weeks.

Some women may need to go to hospital for a D&C (dilatation and curettage) if the cramps are severe, the bleeding is severe, there are signs

of infection or all the tissue does not come out. For most women, having this minor surgery includes having a general anesthetic, and then the tissue lining the uterus is removed.

Having a miscarriage is a sad, upsetting experience. Share your feelings with someone. Let your family doctor know if you are unable to cope or need help.

### **When should I call the doctor?**

Call the clinic doctor, your family doctor, or go to the hospital if:

- You are soaking more than 2 pads per hour for more than 3 hours.
- Simple steps to manage the cramps, such as use of heating pad, are not enough and the painkillers are not working or the pain is more than you can handle.
- Your temperature is more than 38 degrees Celsius or 101 degrees Fahrenheit for 2 readings half an hour apart.

