



Women and
Children's Health

North Bristol **NHS**
NHS Trust

Pregnancy of Unknown Location



Exceptional healthcare, personally delivered

Pregnancy of Unknown Location

We hope that this information will help you to understand what is happening at the moment in your pregnancy.

It is important to understand that not everyone sent to the Early Pregnancy Clinic will be appropriate for an ultrasound scan. For other women, a scan may have been performed, but a pregnancy has not been seen.

Pregnancy of unknown Location can seem confusing initially. We hope that this leaflet will help to make things clearer.

How can I have a positive pregnancy test and not be able to be scanned?

Some women arrive at the clinic and are only 4 or 5 weeks pregnant by dates, so are too early for a scan to guide what should happen.

How can I have a positive pregnancy test and not be able to see the baby on scan yet?

There are three possibilities:

- You may be very early into the pregnancy, and it is normal not to have clarity on a scan until about 6 weeks of pregnancy.
- You may have miscarried. Some women have already had pain/bleeding before attending clinic. A pregnancy test can stay positive for up to 3 weeks following a miscarriage until hormones settle down completely.

- Where there is no clear diagnosis by scan, this is called a pregnancy of unknown location (PUL). A small number of women with a PUL, will be diagnosed with an ectopic pregnancy.

The aim of being cautious in how we look after you is to ensure we care for you safely and exclude an ectopic.

What is an ectopic pregnancy?

This is where the pregnancy grows outside of the womb - most commonly in a fallopian tube, where the pregnancy is often so small it cannot be seen on scan. There is not enough room in a tube for the pregnancy to grow, and the blood supply is not the same as in the womb, so a pregnancy can grow very slowly. An ectopic pregnancy will sadly always be a pregnancy that will not survive.

How do I find out what is happening with the pregnancy?

There are a number of things that help us to give you the answer.

- We start by asking you questions about your symptoms.
- You may need an abdominal and internal examination.
- We take blood to assess your hormone levels – looking at a hormone level called BHCG. This is a guide for what is happening in early pregnancy.
- We repeat the hormone level in 48hrs. This tells us if the hormone level is rising or falling and helps to guide what we do next.

How long before I get any answers?

We know that this is an anxious time. Waiting and uncertainty are always difficult and stressful. Although we will have the results of your blood test the day they are taken, we will not usually call you. We need the 2nd blood test as a comparison before making any decisions.

1. If an early pregnancy is diagnosed, a further scan will be needed. It is common to allow the pregnancy time to grow, and scan again within 2-3 weeks.
2. Sadly, in some women a miscarriage will be confirmed. A further scan may be advised to ensure the lining of the womb returns to normal, but many women will not need to return to the clinic.

What treatment do I need?

Many women will not need any treatment.

- If we feel this is an early pregnancy that just needs some time to develop, you wait for a scan and no treatment is needed.
- If we find that sadly a miscarriage has occurred, a further scan may be needed to ensure the lining of the womb is back to normal. Many women will not need to return to the clinic. We would however advise you to repeat a pregnancy test 3 weeks later to ensure everything has come back to normal. We would expect that your pain and bleeding would settle by this time. If you still have any problems we would expect you to call us for advice.

- Ectopic pregnancy can occur in about 1 in 80 women. If we are concerned about an ectopic pregnancy, additional blood tests and scans will be needed. There is a separate leaflet available for ectopic pregnancy.

While I am waiting for results what do I need to look out for?

If you feel unwell at home in any way it is important that you call us directly.

These are the symptoms you should phone us about.

- **Bleeding** – heavier than a normal period or passing large clots.
- **Pain in your stomach** – any pain that increases / does not go away taking mild painkillers.
- **Specific sharp pain to the right or left side.**
- **Feeling faint and dizzy** – especially when standing up.
- **Pain in your shoulders.**
- **Diarrhoea / loose stools** (in combination with any of the above).

Any other concerns – do not hesitate to give us a call, using the telephone number on the back of this leaflet.

References and sources of further information

National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE). (2012) Ectopic pregnancy and miscarriage: Diagnosis and initial management in early pregnancy of ectopic pregnancy and miscarriage (CG154). NHS. England. [accessed May 2017]

Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists - (Green Top Guidance 25)
www.rcog.org.uk [accessed May 2017]

Early Pregnancy Information Centre
www.earlypregnancy.org.uk [accessed May 2017]

NHS Constitution. Information on your rights and responsibilities. Available at www.nhs.uk/aboutnhs/constitution

**PATIENT
APPROVED** 

How to contact us:



Early Pregnancy Clinic
Cotswold Centre
Southmead Hospital
Bristol BS10 5NB



EPC
0117 414 6778
8.30 am - 2.30 pm Mon - Thurs
8.30 am - 12 noon Friday



Cotswold Ward
0117 414 6785
24 hours



www.nbt.nhs.uk/epac

If you or the individual you are caring for need support reading this leaflet please ask a member of staff for advice.

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