

Patient Information

Pregnancy of unknown location

Women's Services



This leaflet is for women and their families in East and North Hertfordshire who have been referred for an ultrasound in early pregnancy but the ultrasound team have been unable to see a pregnancy on scan.

Introduction

As a result of symptoms early in your pregnancy (most commonly bleeding and/or abdominal pain) we have performed an ultrasound scan to identify the location of your pregnancy.

During the ultrasound scan you have been told that your womb is empty and that you have a **pregnancy of unknown location**.

This is a confusing diagnosis. We hope that this leaflet helps to try and explain what we mean by that and what happens next.

What is a pregnancy of unknown location?

A pregnancy of unknown location means one of three possibilities:

1. **Early intrauterine pregnancy** – this means the pregnancy is in the correct place but too small to see on scan.
2. **Miscarriage** – this means the pregnancy has ended and the developing tissue has already passed out of the body.
3. **Ectopic pregnancy** – this means the pregnancy is developing outside the womb.

There is more detail explaining each of the above possibilities later on in this leaflet.

What happens next?

At the moment we cannot be sure which of the above three possibilities applies to you. We will need to take a blood sample that measures the level of your pregnancy hormone (beta HCG) which may need to be repeated once or twice every 48 hours to compare the levels.

You will need to attend the Woodlands Clinic for this test. The pattern of the hormone level will help us decide whether you have an early developing pregnancy, a miscarriage or a likely ectopic pregnancy.

Depending on your past gynaecological history and any examinations performed by our team, we may need to keep you in hospital whilst we make this decision but for most women we can do all of our investigations safely while you are an outpatient.

After each blood test, one of our team will contact you later that day to inform you of the result, what it means, and any further investigations that may be required, such as repeat bloods or scan.

If you do not receive a call within 4 hours of your blood being taken, please telephone the Woodlands Clinic on 01438 286190.

Early Intrauterine Pregnancy

This is where the pregnancy is developing in the womb but has not yet developed to a stage where we can see it on an ultrasound scan. It is not possible to tell whether this pregnancy is viable; that is, whether it will continue to develop normally. This is a very common situation, especially if you are unsure of the date of your last period and/or have irregular periods.

A repeat scan in 10-14 days will allow for further development and we should be able to see the pregnancy in the womb, assuming you have had no further heavy bleeding.

Miscarriage

If you have had heavy bleeding in this pregnancy, it is quite likely you may have passed the pregnancy during this time. Since everything has passed, nothing is seen in your womb on scan. This is termed a **complete miscarriage**.

No further intervention is needed, just a follow-up home pregnancy test in 3 weeks to confirm that the result is negative. We will call you to see how you are and to ask you about the result of your pregnancy test. You will then be discharged back to your GP.

You can, if appropriate for you, try to conceive again once your periods restart, which is usually around 2-6 weeks after the miscarriage is complete.

If your pregnancy test is still positive after 3 weeks, you should contact us on 01438 286190. We will discuss your symptoms with you and arrange for an appropriate follow-up for you.

Ectopic Pregnancy

Ectopic pregnancy is a common, potentially life-threatening condition affecting 1 in 80 pregnancies. There are some factors that increase your risk of having an ectopic pregnancy:

- Previous ectopic
- Pelvic inflammatory disease (PID)
- Previous tubal surgery
- Smoking
- Appendicitis
- Presence of a coil (IUCD)
- Use of the mini pill (POP)
- IVF ovulation/induction
- Emergency contraception

Ectopic pregnancy occurs when the fertilised egg implants outside the cavity of the womb, usually in the fallopian tube, and as the pregnancy continues it causes pain and bleeding.

If it is not treated quickly enough, it can burst the tube and cause abdominal bleeding. This can lead to shock and even death.

An ectopic pregnancy is not a viable pregnancy (will not develop normally) and is consequently termed a type of miscarriage.

Normally, a fertilised egg travels from the ovary down the fallopian tube where it then implants in the womb usually six to seven days after fertilisation. In an ectopic pregnancy, the egg does not travel all the way down the fallopian tube and therefore implants outside the womb.

In most cases the precise cause of an ectopic pregnancy is not known but often there has been some sort of damage to the fallopian tubes causing a blockage or narrowing. The damage may have been caused by previous surgery or infection.

If you do have an ectopic pregnancy, this will usually be treated with either medication or surgery although for some women, we can let nature take its course as we monitor you weekly. Further information will be given to you about this if it applies to you.

Emotions

It is not unusual to feel low in mood or tearful during this time of uncertainty, some people can even feel angry. If you feel that you, or your partner, need more information at any time then please contact us on 01438 286190.

Please use this space to write down any notes or questions you may wish to ask:

Useful contact telephone numbers

Woodlands Clinic (Early Pregnancy Unit) ☎ 01438 286190

◇ Monday to Friday, 8am - 8pm

◇ Saturday and Sunday, 9am - 5pm

Ward 10AN - Gynaecology ☎ 01438 286195

Further information

If you feel that you, or your partner, need more help coming to terms with losing your baby, here are some contact numbers which may be useful:

Bereavement Midwife ☎ 07770 280868

The Miscarriage Association ☎ 01924 200799

(Mon-Fri, 9am-4pm)

www.miscarriageassociation.org.uk

The Ectopic Pregnancy Trust (24hrs) ☎ 020 7733 2653

www.ectopic.org.uk

www.enherts-tr.nhs.uk

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