

PROBLEM PREGNANCIES

Infertility: is defined by most doctors as the inability to conceive a pregnancy after regular sexual intercourse, without the use of any form of contraception, after six months. It is estimated that 15 percent of all married couples are infertile. This means that about one in seven married couples has a fertility problem, and one in 12 couples fail to have a baby.

Ectopic Pregnancy (Tubal Pregnancy): The egg attaches to the wall of the fallopian tube instead of the uterine wall.

Multiple Births: In multiple births the lack of space, which is a problem in itself, can cause other problems. The uterus can only hold so much and multiple births (because of the lack of space) usually cause the mother to deliver before the babies are fully matured. Twins occur about 1 in 87 births, triplets 1 in 7000 births, quadruplets 1 in 550,000 births, and quintuplets 1 in 57,000,000 births. (Fertility drugs may alter these statistics.)

Genetic Defects: This term refers to defects or abnormalities that are truly hereditary. They are passed from parents to their offspring by the reproductive cells (sperm and egg). These traits are carried by the genes. If either of the prospective parents knows that their families have genetic abnormalities, they should consult their family physician, who in turn may refer them to a genetic counselor. The following is a list of some of the more common defects that are inherited or genetically determined:

Common Genetic Defects:

Down's Syndrome (Mongolism): caused by the presence of three instead of two of the 21st chromosomes. Characterized by slanting eyes, broad hands with short fingers, and a short, broad skull.

Phenylketonuria (PKU): a deficiency of the enzyme necessary to convert protein. May cause severe retardation in late childhood.

Sickle Cell Anemia: found mainly among children of black families. Creates defective red blood cells and affects 8-10% of the American black population.

Diabetes: The pancreas does not function properly and the body does not carry on normal metabolism of sugar.

Tay Sachs Disease: The person has defective eyes and suffers gradual blindness with a severe loss of weight. It is found mainly among Jewish children of eastern European origin. This defect affects the central nervous system and finally causes death.

Hemophilia: The blood does not clot normally. It is found only among males. Females may transmit the disease but do not suffer from it.

Still born: A stillbirth, meaning "quiet birth" occurs when a fetus which has died in the uterus or during labor or delivery exits a woman's body.

SPONTANEOUS ABORTION/MISCARRIAGE

When the baby is involuntarily expelled from the body of the woman before it is viable (capable of surviving on its own), it is clinically termed a spontaneous abortion. You may be more familiar with the household term miscarriage. A spontaneous abortion should not be confused with a voluntary abortion, which is terminating the pregnancy by mechanical means.

Usually a spontaneous abortion (miscarriage) is nature's way of eliminating an abnormal pregnancy. About 15% of all pregnancies end in spontaneous abortions (about one out of every six pregnancies). Experts suggest that approximately 25-50% of spontaneous abortions are a result of chromosomal problems.

Some common causes of spontaneous abortion are:

INFECTION: any type of acute infection carried in the body may be dangerous to the fetus.

OLD OR AGED OVUM: fertilized just before it dies.

DEFECTIVE IMPLANTATION: the placenta breaks loose due to a lack of hormones.

ECTOPIC OR TUBAL PREGNANCY: 1 in 300 pregnancies are ectopic.

CORD ACCIDENTS: the cord may be torn off or twisted.

PLACENTA PRAEVIA: the placenta is low in the uterus or may even cover the cervix and precedes the baby.

PLACENTA ABRUPTION: premature separation from uterine wall.

TOXEMIA: near the 24th week, the mother gets swelling, puffy fingers, and feet. The body does not use protein correctly, which results in albumin (protein in the urine). this can cause convulsions, stillbirths, or maternal death.

HEMORRHAGE (Bleeding): usually caused by a placenta abruption or placenta praevia.

Most spontaneous abortions occur in the first trimester (the first 12 weeks). The baby usually dies two to four weeks before it is expelled.

If all of the products of conception are not completely expelled, it may be necessary for the doctor to perform a D and C (dilation and curettage). The walls of the uterus are scraped gently with surgical instruments to remove the remaining tissue.