

What to know about bleeding during pregnancy



Approximately half of all pregnant women have some bleeding or spotting during their pregnancy. Mild cramping and light spotting are normal in early pregnancy when the fertilized egg implants itself in the uterus. However, as bleeding may be a sign of miscarriage or other serious complications, it is important to call your healthcare provider when it occurs, even if the bleeding stops.

First Trimester Bleeding

Physicians estimate that 25-40% of women will experience some bleeding during the first trimester of their pregnancy. According to the American Pregnancy Association, there are a number of possible causes of spotting or bleeding during early pregnancy, including:

Implantation Bleeding

Implantation bleeding happens when the fertilized egg attaches to the lining of the uterus. It usually occurs 10 to 14 days after conception, around the time you would have a menstrual period. It is possible to mistake implantation bleeding for a period. Implantation bleeding is light, stops on its own, and doesn't require medical treatment.

Miscarriage

Miscarriage is the spontaneous loss of a pregnancy before the 20th week. It happens in about 15-20% of pregnancies, most often in the first 13 weeks. The following signs may indicate a miscarriage:

- Vaginal bleeding
- Cramping pain in the lower abdomen (more intense than menstrual cramps)
- Tissue passing from the vagina

Most miscarriages cannot be prevented. They are often the body's way of dealing with a pregnancy that was not normal. Having a miscarriage

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doesn't prevent you from having more children and it doesn't always mean something is wrong with your health. If you have two or more in a row, your doctor may administer tests to look for a cause.

Bleeding During Your Second and Third Trimester

Late bleeding may pose a threat to the health of you and your fetus. Contact your healthcare provider if you experience bleeding in the second or third trimester of your pregnancy. Late pregnancy bleeding can be caused by complications such as:

Placental Abruption

Vaginal bleeding can be caused by the placenta detaching from the uterine wall before or during labor. This is called placental abruption. Only 1% of pregnant women have this problem, and it usually occurs during the last twelve weeks of pregnancy.

Placenta Previa

Placenta previa occurs when the placenta lies low in the uterus, partially or completely covering the cervix. Bleeding usually occurs without pain. One in every two-hundred pregnant women experience placenta previa. It is serious and requires immediate care.

Pre-term Labor

Vaginal bleeding may be a sign of pre-term labor. Up to a few weeks before labor begins, the mucus plug may pass. If this occurs too early, you could be entering pre-term labor and you should see your physician immediately. Signs of pre-term labor include:

- Pelvic or lower abdominal pressure
- Stomach cramps, with or without diarrhea
- Regular contractions or uterine tightening
- Vaginal discharge (watery, mucus, or bloody)

Contact Your Physician When Bleeding Occurs

No matter when it occurs, any bleeding during pregnancy warrants a call to your doctor or midwife. Be prepared to answer detailed questions about the amount, color, and timing of blood in order to best help your healthcare provider determine the possible cause.

Knowledge is Power

If you have questions about your pregnancy, ask your doctor. You can also visit the following websites:

March of Dimes:
www.marchofdimes.org

First 5 California:
www.first5california.com

Remember: If you have any questions or concerns at any time, make sure you contact your doctor right away.

