

Bleeding in early pregnancy

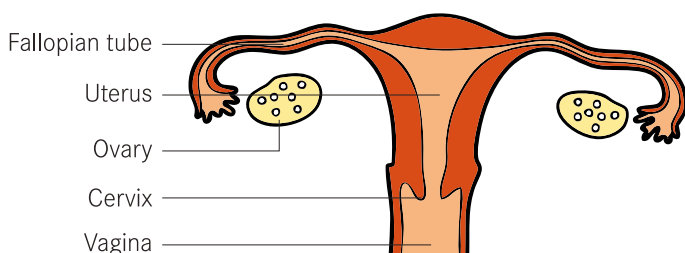
What is bleeding in early pregnancy?

Bleeding from the vagina in early pregnancy is common. It is thought to happen in almost one-in-four pregnancies.

It is not always possible to find out why a woman is bleeding. One cause is called an *implantation bleed*. This occurs when the pregnancy implants (buries) itself into the lining of the *uterus* (womb). The bleeding will often last a few days then stop.

About one in three women who have bleeding will go on to miscarry. A miscarriage is the loss of a pregnancy before the *foetus* (unborn baby) can survive outside the womb. Miscarriage usually occurs in the first 12 weeks of pregnancy.

Most miscarriages occur without a clear cause. The development of a baby is a complex process. If something goes wrong, the pregnancy will fail.



Treatment

It can take some time for the doctor to find out why you are bleeding. You may require a number of tests, including:

- a vaginal examination
- blood tests
- an ultrasound scan.

A vaginal examination looks at the size of your uterus and the amount of bleeding. The examination lasts a few minutes and there may be mild discomfort.

Blood tests are taken to check your blood type and sometimes the amount of pregnancy hormones in the blood.

If you are *Rhesus (Rh) negative*, you may require an injection of *anti-D immunoglobulin* to prevent problems with the *Rh factor* in future pregnancies.

An *ultrasound* uses sound waves to look at the pregnancy and foetus. The scan involves placing some gel on your *abdomen* (tummy) then a hand-held scanner provides pictures of the pregnancy.

In early pregnancy (less than 12 weeks) more information is gained by using a small slender scanner which is placed in the vagina. You will need to have a full bladder prior to the scan. An ultrasound scan takes around 15 to 20 minutes.

If an ultrasound is needed, it can be arranged through the emergency department or your local doctor. Most women are eager to know very quickly what is happening. However, there is usually no urgency and the ultrasound can be done in the days ahead.

Home care

No specific treatment can prevent a miscarriage, but there are some general measures that may help.

- Get plenty of rest.
- Use pads rather than tampons while you are bleeding.
- Avoid sex while you are bleeding. Sex can resume once the bleeding has stopped.
- Take mild painkillers, such as paracetamol, if needed.
- Report any changes in your condition to your local doctor.

What to expect

The bleeding may be light and stop in a day or two. Many people go on to have a healthy baby at full term (38-40 weeks).

Sometimes the bleeding can become heavy and a miscarriage is likely. During a miscarriage, some of the pregnancy tissue may remain inside and this can lead to very heavy bleeding if it is not treated.

The doctor will advise if you need further treatment.

This may include a *dilatation and curette* (D&C) to remove pregnancy tissue.

How will I feel?

You may feel a range of emotions over this time. Guilt is a normal feeling but do not blame yourself, as you have most likely done nothing wrong. Your body will be going through changes in hormone levels and this can make you feel very emotional. It may help to talk to family or friends.



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Notes:

Seeking help



Return to the emergency department

promptly or call an ambulance (dial 000) if:

- you have severe pain
- are losing a lot of blood
- you are dizzy or collapse
- the vaginal discharge is offensive smelling
- you have pain in the tip of your shoulder/s.



For other medical problems or any concerns see your local doctor or health care professional.



For health advice from a Registered Nurse you can call **NURSE-ON-CALL 24 hours a day** on **1300 60 60 24** for the cost of a local call from anywhere in Victoria.*

NURSE-ON-CALL provides access to **interpreting services** for callers not confident with English. Call **1300 60 60 24**.

*Calls from mobile calls may be charged at a higher rate



Want to know more?

- Ask your local doctor or health care professional.
- Visit the **Better Health Channel** www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au

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