

## **Repeated Miscarriages**

**Miscarriage** is the loss of a pregnancy before 20 weeks. It occurs in 10–15% of all known pregnancies. Most miscarriages occur in the first 3 months of pregnancy. When pregnancy loss occurs two or more times in a row, it may be called **Repeated Miscarriage**. Special tests are required to find the cause. Even if someone has had repeated miscarriages, there is still a good chance to have a baby.

This chapter will explain:

- Causes of repeated miscarriage
- Tests and procedures which might be needed
- Special care needed to be taken during pregnancy

### **Causes**

There are many reasons for repeated miscarriage. In at least one half of all repeated miscarriages, the cause cannot be found. Sometimes, your doctor can identify a certain cause. In other cases, the cause is suspected but the link is not clear. If someone has had more than one miscarriage, each may have a different cause.

### **Known Causes**

Sometimes a miscarriage can be linked to chromosomal problems in the foetus, problems with the woman's uterus or medical conditions in the woman. There are tests to help your doctor determine what caused the miscarriage. In some cases, treatment is available to avoid problems in future pregnancies.

#### **Chromosomal Problems:**

More than one half of miscarriages in the first 13 weeks of pregnancy are caused by problems with the **chromosomes** of the foetus. Chromosomes are tiny structures in the cells of the body. Each carries many **genes**. Genes determine all of a person's physical traits, such as sex, hair and eye color, and blood type.

There can be problems with the number or structure of chromosomes, or with the genes they carry. Extra or missing chromosomes or genes mean the foetus will not grow as it should. Often, miscarriage is nature's way of ending a pregnancy in which the foetus would not have been able to live.

Many such problems occur by chance and have nothing to do with the health of the mother or father. However, in a small number of cases, problems with the parents' chromosomes can cause repeated miscarriage. There are tests to find out if such problems are a factor in repeated miscarriage.

### **Problems of the Uterus:**

Several problems of the **uterus** are linked to repeated miscarriage. Most of them are uncommon. They include:

- Defects present from birth, such as a uterus that is divided into two sections by a wall of tissue (separate uterus).
- Benign growths in the uterus, such as fibroids, made up of muscle tissue.
- The **cervix** that begins to widen and open too soon, in the middle of pregnancy, with no sign of pain or labor.

Most of these problems can be treated with surgery. Your doctor will advise you of a suitable option.

### **Medical Conditions:**

Certain conditions in the mother have been linked to a greater risk of repeated miscarriage. These include:

- **Lupus** and other **auto immune disorders**
- Heart disease
- Severe kidney disease, mainly when linked with high blood pressure
- Diabetes
- Thyroid disease
- Infection in the uterus
- **Polycystic ovary syndrome**

In some cases, treating the condition can improve the chance of a successful pregnancy. This is even more true if the condition is under control before a woman becomes pregnant.

### **Antiphospholipid Syndrome:**

Antiphospholipid syndrome is a disorder of the immune system. Women with antiphospholipid syndrome are at increased risk for blood clots and pregnancy loss. Tests can be done to diagnose this condition.

### **Possible Factors**

There are other factors that are known to cause pregnancy loss. The link between these factors and miscarriage is not clear. The most common factors include hormone imbalance and certain blood disorders. If your doctor suspects any of these

conditions, he or she may want to do a test and if necessary, prescribe medication to treat the problem so it does not affect your pregnancy.

### **Hormone Imbalance:**

Progesterone is a hormone that prepares the lining of the uterus to nourish a fertilized egg. This happens during the second half of the menstrual cycle. Early in pregnancy, if progesterone levels are too low to maintain the pregnancy, miscarriage can occur. Tests can show if a woman's body is not making enough progesterone. The doctor may prescribe medication to treat the problem.

### **Certain Blood Disorders:**

Thrombophilia is a type of disorder that can make blood clot more than it should. There are several types of genetic disorders that can lead to thrombophilia. One type of disorder, Factor V Leiden mutation, may allow clots to form in the blood vessels to the **placenta** and lead to miscarriage. Pregnant women with this disorder may be prescribed blood thinners.

### **Diagnosis**

To help find the cause of repeated miscarriage, you will be asked about your medical history and past pregnancies. A complete physical exam, including a **pelvic exam**, may be done. You may be offered genetic counseling. You also may need certain tests:

- Blood tests to detect any problems with hormones or the immune system
- Chromosomal testing of both you and your partner or of the miscarriage tissue, if it is available
- Tests to detect infection of the uterus

Procedures also may be done to help detect problems in the uterus:

- Hysterosalpingography - An X-ray of the uterus and fallopian tubes is taken after the organs are injected with a small amount of dye.
- Hysteroscopy - A thin, light-transmitting device is inserted through the vagina and cervix to view the inside of the uterus.
- Ultrasound - Sound waves are used to create an image of the internal organs.
- Sonohysterogram - A vaginal ultrasound is used to view the uterus. A saline solution is injected into the uterus to help expand the uterus for better viewing.

## **Coping**

The loss of a pregnancy—no matter how early or how late—can cause feelings of grief. You may be troubled and even overwhelmed by these feelings. You may feel discouraged. For many women, it takes longer for their emotions to heal than their bodies.

Your feelings of grief may differ from those of your partner. You may express your feelings in different ways. Reach out to those closest to you and ask for their comfort and support. Talk to your doctor. There may be support groups in your area that are eager to help. Counseling can help both you and your partner to cope with your feelings.

## **What You Can Do**

If you have had repeated miscarriages, you need to think ahead. Future pregnancies should be planned, diagnosed early, and checked closely. You may be able to improve your chances of having a successful pregnancy in the future by doing certain things:

- Have a complete medical workup before you try to get pregnant again.
- If you think that you might be pregnant, see your doctor right away.
- Follow your doctor's instructions.
- Maintain a healthy lifestyle by eating healthy foods, exercising, and avoiding alcohol, tobacco, and illegal drugs.

## **Finally. . .**

Even if you have had repeated miscarriages, you still have a good chance to have a baby. This is true even if the causes of the past losses cannot be found. Future pregnancies will need early care. Talk to your doctor about any special care you may need as your baby grows.