

Information Leaflet

Complications of Fertility Treatment

Some infertility treatments can cause complications, these include side effects from medication, multiple pregnancy and stress.

Side effects of medication

Some medications used to treat infertility can cause side effects. These may include:


- nausea
- vomiting
- diarrhoea
- stomach pains
- headaches
- hot flushes
- skin sensitivity reactions and bruising around the injection sites
- hormonal related mood changes

For a full list of possible side effects, please see the patient information leaflet that comes with your medication.

Ovarian hyperstimulation syndrome

Ovarian hyperstimulation syndrome (OHSS) can occur after taking medicines that stimulate your ovaries, such as clomiphene and gonadotrophins, and can develop after in-vitro fertilisation (IVF). OHSS causes your ovaries to swell and produce too many follicles (small fluid-filled sacs in which an egg develops).

Around one-third of women will experience mild OHSS after one cycle of IVF. Less than 5% will develop moderate or severe OHSS after one cycle of IVF.

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Mild symptoms may include:

- nausea
- vomiting
- abdominal pain
- bloating
- constipation (when you are unable to empty your bowels)
- diarrhoea
- dark, concentrated urine

Severe OHSS is a potentially life-threatening condition and can lead to:

- thrombosis (a blood clot in an artery or vein)
- liver and kidney dysfunction
- respiratory distress (difficulty breathing)

You should seek medical attention immediately if you experience any of the symptoms of OHSS.

You may need to go to hospital so that your condition can be monitored and treated by healthcare professionals.

Ectopic pregnancy

"Ectopic" means in the wrong place. An ectopic pregnancy occurs when the embryo implants outside of your womb. More than 95% of ectopic pregnancies occur in the fallopian tubes.

If an embryo implants in your fallopian tube and continues to grow, it can result in tubal rupture which is a potentially life-threatening event. Signs of an ectopic pregnancy include:


- pains low down in your stomach
- vaginal bleeding

Please inform The Hewitt Fertility Centre if you experience either of these symptoms early in your pregnancy. Alternatively, you can contact the Emergency Room at the Liverpool Women's Hospital for further advice.

If you are receiving fertility treatment, your chance of having an ectopic pregnancy is around 3%. This is higher than the usual rate of ectopic pregnancies, which is around 1%. You may be more likely to have an ectopic pregnancy if you have already had problems with your fallopian tubes.

Pelvic infection

The procedure to extract an egg from an ovary may result in a painful infection developing in your pelvis. However, the risk of serious infection is very low. For example, there is likely to be less than one serious infection for every 500 procedures performed.

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Multiple pregnancy

Having more than one baby may not seem like a bad thing, but it does significantly increase the risk of developing complications for both you and your children. Multiple pregnancy is the greatest health risk of fertility treatment.

Possible complications of multiple pregnancy include:

- Babies born prematurely or with a low birth weight – this affects 50% of twins and 90% of triplets.
- Your baby dying within the first week of life – the risk of this happening is five times higher for twins, and nine times higher for triplets, than for a single baby.
- Your baby having cerebral palsy (a condition that affects the brain and nervous system) – the risk of this happening is five times higher for twins and 18 times higher for triplets than for single babies.
- High blood pressure (hypertension) during pregnancy – this affects up to 25% of women who are carrying more than one baby.
- Developing diabetes during the pregnancy (diabetes is a condition caused by too much glucose in the blood) – the risk is two to three times higher for women carrying more than one baby than it is for those carrying a single baby.


In the UK, the number of multiple births from IVF treatment is 6%, this is higher than the usual rate of multiple pregnancy, which is around 2%.

Stress

Infertility can be stressful and strain relationships. It may be helpful for you to join a support group where you can talk through your feelings with others who may be experiencing similar issues.

Finding out you have a fertility problem can be traumatic and many couples find it helpful to talk to a counsellor. The counsellor will be able to discuss treatment options, how they may affect you and your emotional wellbeing. Your GP should be able to refer you to a counsellor as part of your fertility treatment.

<http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/infertility/pages/complications.aspx>


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This leaflet can be made available in different formats on request. If you would like to make any suggestions or comments about the content of this leaflet, then please contact the Patient Experience Team on 0151 702 4353 or by email at pals@lwh.nhs.uk

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