

# Checking your hormone levels in early pregnancy

## Early Pregnancy Assessment Unit

Information for Patients

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### Introduction

When you are pregnant a hormone called  $\beta$ hCG (pronounced "beta-HCG") is produced by the placenta. Its full name is Beta-human Chorionic Gonadotrophin. Checking the level of this hormone in the blood gives important information about the pregnancy.

This leaflet aims to give some information about why we are checking your  $\beta$ hCG levels.

### Why do I need to have a $\beta$ hCG blood test?

You have had ultrasound scan because you have had pain or bleeding in the pregnancy or you have previous miscarriage(s) or ectopic pregnancy. The ultrasound was unable to clearly see where the pregnancy is growing. This is called a pregnancy of unknown location.

**There are 3 possibilities with a pregnancy of unknown location:**

1. The pregnancy is in the womb, in the right place but it is too small (too early in the pregnancy) for us to see it.
2. You may have already had a miscarriage so we cannot see the pregnancy on the scan
3. The pregnancy is not in the womb itself but is growing outside the womb. This is called an ectopic pregnancy.

### What is an ectopic pregnancy?

An ectopic pregnancy is a pregnancy which is growing outside the womb. This happens about 1 in 50 pregnancies. Most of the time the pregnancy did not move along the fallopian tube as it should and started to grow in the tube instead. Rarely the pregnancy can be growing in other places like on the ovary or in a caesarean section scar.

**Health information and support is available at [www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk)  
or call 111 for non-emergency medical advice**

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To give feedback about this information sheet, contact [InformationForPatients@uhl-tr.nhs.uk](mailto:InformationForPatients@uhl-tr.nhs.uk)

If an ectopic pregnancy is not treated, the growing pregnancy might burst through (rupture) the fallopian tube or cause other problems. This will cause severe internal bleeding which can be life threatening. The  $\beta$ hCG blood tests along with the ultrasound scan can help pick up ectopic pregnancies so we can offer you treatment before the tube bursts.

## What does the test involve?

The test involves taking a sample of blood and sending it to the laboratory to measure the amount of  $\beta$ hCG.

At least 1 further sample of blood is needed 2 days later. The amount of  $\beta$ hCG in each sample is compared to see whether there has been a rise or fall in the hormone level.

## What happens now?

Most women will be able to go home after the 1st blood test. You will then come back after 2 days and have a 2nd test. The nurse from EPAU will contact you with the result of the 2nd test and check to see if you are well. Depending on the results of the  $\beta$ hCG tests, your symptoms, and the most likely of the 3 possibilities, the nurse will discuss the plan with you.

You will then be told when to return for a further  $\beta$ hCG blood test or scan. If we are concerned about your blood test result, we may ask that you return to hospital for review by the consultant on call.

## What do the $\beta$ hCG results mean?

- In a normal healthy pregnancy the  $\beta$ hCG levels rise quickly, often doubling in 48 hours
- After a miscarriage the  $\beta$ hCG levels will usually fall quickly
- In an ectopic pregnancy, the  $\beta$ hCG levels may rise or fall very slightly. Sometimes the  $\beta$ hCG level is more than 2000 so an ectopic pregnancy is strongly suspected even before the 2nd  $\beta$ hCG test. At that level we should be able to see the pregnancy if it were growing in the right place inside the womb. If we think you have an ectopic pregnancy, you will be asked to return to hospital for review by the consultant and you may need to stay in overnight.

**If there is anything you do not understand, please talk to a member of the Early Pregnancy Assessment Team.**

## What symptoms should I look out for?

1. Any new or increasing/worsening pain in your belly.
2. Feeling light headed/dizzy or fainting especially if you are also being sick (vomiting)
3. Pain at the tip of your shoulders.
4. Vaginal bleeding which is heavier than your normal period.

If you have any of these symptoms or are worried at all, please telephone the

### Gynaecology Assessment Unit :

Telephone number: 0116 258 6259 at any time, day or night.

## What shall I do over the next few days?

- You should rest as much as you are able to.
- Contact the Gynaecology Assessment unit 0116 258 6259 at any time, day or night if you notice any worsening in your symptoms or are worried at all.
- Keep your 'phone close by you so that we can contact you and stay within easy reach of the hospital at all times.

If you have not had the results of your blood test by 3pm the next day please call Early Pregnancy Assessment Unit to speak to the Nurse Specialist: 0116 258 6322

## Support Groups

[www.miscarriageassociation.org.uk/](http://www.miscarriageassociation.org.uk/)

Telephone: 01924 200 799 (Mon to Fri, 9am to 4pm)



Ectopic pregnancy trust: [ectopic.org.uk/](http://ectopic.org.uk/)



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