



Risks and complications of assisted conception

INTRODUCTION

No medical treatment is entirely free from risk and infertility treatment is no exception. It is important, however, to appreciate that most patients go through IVF and other assisted conception treatments without any problems at all.

The risks associated with infertility treatment can be considered over six categories:

- The risks associated with the drugs used to stimulate ovaries
- The surgical risks associated with egg collection
- Laboratory issues and risks
- The risks associated with pregnancy
- The risks of an abnormal pregnancy
- Psychological and emotional risks

RISKS ASSOCIATED WITH PREGNANCY

Multiple pregnancy

Multiple pregnancy can result from any treatment involving the use of drugs to stimulate egg production or when more than one embryo is replaced during IVF / ICSI or egg donation treatment. A twin pregnancy can also establish from a single embryo splitting – this results in identical twins.

The likelihood of a twin pregnancy is approximately 10% following clomifene treatment, 20-25% following IVF when two embryos are replaced and 10-20% following IUI treatment.

Aria Fertility is continually looking at strategies to reduce multiple pregnancy risks. The simplest of these is to replace a single embryo, Aria Fertility are also looking at better embryo selection techniques, such as blastocyst culture, to help us identify embryos with the best implantation potential which we hope will help us to feel more confident about single embryo replacements.

Triplet pregnancy can also result from any of these treatments but is less likely. The risk of triplets following IVF and related treatments is very low if 1 or 2 embryos are replaced although occasionally an embryo can split. If three embryos are replaced the likelihood of triplets increases. After clomifene therapy the chance of conceiving triplets is less than 0.5% and 1-2 % following IUI treatment.

The complications of multiple pregnancy are:

- increased risk of miscarriage and complications such as haemorrhage and high blood pressure during pregnancy
- higher rate of premature birth and the problems arising from low birth weight
- increased risk of Caesarean section
- higher rate of still birth, or death shortly after birth
- higher rate of disability and other health problems, which may lead to extended stays in hospital before and after birth
- increased practical, financial and emotional impact on the family

For further information about the risks of multiple pregnancy see www.oneatatime.org.uk.

Ectopic pregnancy (pregnancy occurring outside the womb)

IVF and related treatments increase the likelihood of an ectopic pregnancy. The incidence of ectopic pregnancy is 1-3 % of all pregnancies resulting from embryo transfer. The risk with IVF pregnancies is about twice the normal rate 4-5%. Patients who become pregnant following these treatments should have an early scan to establish if the pregnancy is correctly positioned.

Ectopic pregnancy is usually treated surgically either by removing the fallopian tube or removing the ectopic pregnancy from the fallopian tube. If the ectopic pregnancy is very early it may be possible to use a drug called methotrexate to dissolve the pregnancy tissue. If methotrexate is used you will need to wait six months before attempting further treatment.

Patients who have had a previous Caesarean section delivery are at risk of a subsequent pregnancy establishing at the site of the previous scar in the wall of the uterus. This can usually be recognized by careful ultrasound undertaken in the early stages of pregnancy.

Heterotopic pregnancy

This is a twin pregnancy with one pregnancy in the fallopian tube (or other abnormal place) and one correctly situated in the uterine cavity. Although this is a rare condition its incidence increases following IVF and related treatments. This can sometimes be recognized by careful ultrasound undertaken in the early stages of pregnancy following these treatments. A common symptom is continued bleeding in the presence of a normally developing intrauterine pregnancy with pelvic pain.

Miscarriage

Early miscarriage is very common in naturally conceived pregnancies. IVF and related treatments neither prevent nor increase the risk of miscarriage.