

The James Cook University Hospital
Department of Reproductive Medicine

Ovarian hyperstimulation syndrome (OHSS)

Stimulation of the ovaries is a deliberate consequence of IVF treatment in order to obtain more eggs than would arise in a natural cycle. When the ovaries are too strongly stimulated there is a possibility of ovarian hyperstimulation syndrome (OHSS) developing.

Symptoms of OHSS are most common around the time of egg collection or up to and around ten days after embryo transfer. You may find that things improve only to worsen again nearer to the time of your pregnancy test.

The majority of cases are a mild to moderate form, occurring in up to 5% of all patients undergoing IVF treatment. This presents as abdominal (tummy) swelling, discomfort and nausea (feeling sick). These cases generally settle in a few days and require observation, possible blood tests, but no specialist treatment.

Less commonly (approximately 1% of patients) a more severe case occurs. This happens in approximately 1% of all IVF cycles and the symptoms include -

- A more marked tummy pain and swelling
- Passing small amounts of concentrated urine
- Thirst
- Nausea and vomiting
- Diarrhoea
- Dizziness
- Shortness of breath

If we are concerned that you are at risk of developing moderate or severe OHSS we will keep you under regular review. If your symptoms worsen we might have to admit you to hospital for monitoring and treatment that may include replacement of lost fluids, replacement of protein (albumin) and drainage of fluid from the abdominal cavity. This condition normally responds to treatment and resolves completely in 1-2 weeks. Very rarely OHSS can be life threatening and fatalities have been reported. However, you are ten times more likely to die after natural childbirth than from IVF treatment.

One of the purposes of monitoring the IVF cycle is to detect early signs of OHSS and modify or cancel the treatment if there are indications that this is developing. Treatments may be modified by reducing the strength of stimulation, going ahead with the egg collection, but freezing the embryos - as we know pregnancy aggravates OHSS and can prolong and worsen its course.

OHSS only rarely occurs after ovulation induction and following ovarian stimulation associated with intrauterine insemination (IUI).

If you are at all worried that you may be developing OHSS please contact our nursing team on 01642 854836, out of hours please ring our A&E Department on 01642 854252.