Placenta Previa

Placenta previa is a condition in which the placenta has grown low in the womb (*uterus*). This is a condition in which the organ which connects the fetus to the mother's uterus (*placenta*) is low in the opening in the uterus *(cervix*). It can partially or completely cover the cervix. The cause of this is unknown. It is more common with multiple births or twins.

SYMPTOMS

The main symptom or sign of placenta previa is vaginal bleeding. The bleeding can be mild to very heavy. This condition can be very serious for the mother and baby. Often there are no symptoms with placenta previa. Sometimes if the location of the placenta is very low it will become partially detached and cause bleeding. This may be simply a marginal sinus separation of the placenta. This is a separation of the vessels from the wall of the uterus. This may cause no further problems other than mild anxiety. There is an increase risk of intrauterine growth restriction (IUGR) with placenta previa because of the abnormal placement of the placenta.

DIAGNOSIS

The diagnosis is usually made by ultrasound exam of the uterus. There may be a careful vaginal exam to see the cervix. The patient will be prepared for a Cesarean section immediately if necessary.

TREATMENT

Treatment for placenta previa is usually bed rest in the hospital or at home. You may be given medication to stop contractions. Contractions can increase bleeding. Your doctor may take fluid from the baby's sac (*amniocentesis*) to see if the baby's lungs are mature enough for a C-section. A blood transfusion may be necessary if you have a low blood count. No further treatment may be needed when placenta previa is present in small degrees. Early placenta previa may resolve on it's own. The placenta moves higher in the birth canal as pregnancy progresses. In this case the placenta no longer is an obstruction to birth. The position of the placenta may need to be reconfirmed during pregnancy. This can be done with an ultrasound exam of the belly *(abdomen*). **Call your caregiver immediately if blood loss is severe.** Immediate fluid or blood replacement may be necessary. With complete placenta previa, the only way to safely deliver the baby is by Cesarean section.

HOME CARE INSTRUCTIONS

- Follow your caregiver's advice about bed rest.
- Take any iron pills or other medications your doctor gives to you.
- No bending or lifting.
- Do not have sexual intercourse.
- Do not put anything in your vagina (tampons or vaginal creams). If you are bleeding, use sanitary pads.
- Keep your doctors appointments as scheduled. Not keeping the appointment could result in a chronic or permanent injury, pain, disability and injury or death to you or your unborn baby. If there is any problem keeping the appointment, you must call back to this facility for assistance.

SEEK IMMEDIATE MEDICAL CARE IF:

- You have increased bleeding.
- You have fainting episodes or feel lightheaded.
- You develop abdominal pain.
- You can no longer feel normal fetal or baby movements.
- You develop uterine contractions.

Document Released: 12/18/2006 Document Re-Released: 09/26/2009
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