



MISCARRIAGE
ASSOCIATION

The knowledge to help

Blighted ovum

(anembryonic pregnancy)



Having a miscarriage can be a very unhappy experience. It can be made worse if you don't understand the medical language that is sometimes used to describe what has happened. And it can be even more confusing when there are several different terms that mean the same thing.

This leaflet explains what a blighted ovum is - and the different medical terms that might be used when it is diagnosed.

Blighted ovum and **anembryonic pregnancy** both describe a particular kind of early miscarriage. Although there are the beginnings of a baby, the cells that will become the baby stop developing early on, and the tiny embryo is reabsorbed. However, the pregnancy sac, where the baby should develop, continues to grow.

It is diagnosed by ultrasound scan. The scan picture shows a pregnancy sac which doesn't have a developing baby inside, as it should. (This is sometimes described as showing no fetal pole).

This kind of miscarriage is usually discovered between the 8th and 13th week of pregnancy, sometimes at a routine early scan. You may still have pregnancy symptoms and have no idea that anything is wrong, so it can come as a real shock.

“It's reassuring to know that I did not do anything to make this happen.”

Different names for the same thing

Blighted ovum literally means an egg cell which has something wrong with it, but this doesn't really explain what is seen. Many doctors feel that this is an old-fashioned and unhelpful way of describing a miscarriage. But it is still widely used in hospitals.

Anembryonic pregnancy means a pregnancy without an embryo (**an** means without). This is a better description of what is seen on the scan. But some people find it difficult to understand.

You might also hear it called **early embryo loss** or **early embryonic demise**.

Some leading doctors think that none of these descriptions are right and call it a **missed** or **silent miscarriage**. But that term is more usually used when the scan shows an embryo or baby without a heartbeat.

All in all, it can be very confusing as well as upsetting.

Why does it happen? Was it something I did?

Doctors think that a blighted ovum pregnancy happens because of an error in the early development of the baby – for example, a chromosome error.

It is extremely unlikely to be caused by anything that you or your partner did or didn't do.

Will it happen again?

It might, but it's unlikely. A blighted ovum is a chance event and most women go on to have a healthy pregnancy.

I was told there was no baby there. But I felt pregnant and the pregnancy test was positive

Symptoms like sore breasts, nausea and tiredness are caused by raised levels of pregnancy hormones in your body. They can't tell you whether the baby is developing properly or not.

Unfortunately, in this kind of miscarriage those hormone levels can stay high for some time after the baby has died, so pregnancy tests can still be positive and you may still feel pregnant.

I feel as if I shouldn't be so upset, if there was no baby

There are no rules about how you should or shouldn't feel. But you were pregnant and may well have started thinking "baby" and planning for the future. Even if you find out that the baby died very early on, you may still have a real sense of loss.

That might be especially true if you had no idea that anything was wrong.

Finally

Whether it happens early or late in pregnancy, the experience of any miscarriage can be very distressing.

Whatever your feelings, you don't have to bear them alone. We hope that reading this leaflet has been of some help and that you can use some of our resources to find the support and information that you might need.

The Miscarriage Association

has a telephone helpline, a volunteer support service, an online support forum and a range of helpful leaflets on pregnancy loss.

Do get in touch if we can help.

Need to talk to someone who understands?

Call our support line on 01924 200799. Monday to Friday, 9am-4pm

Or email info@miscarriageassociation.org.uk



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The knowledge to help

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