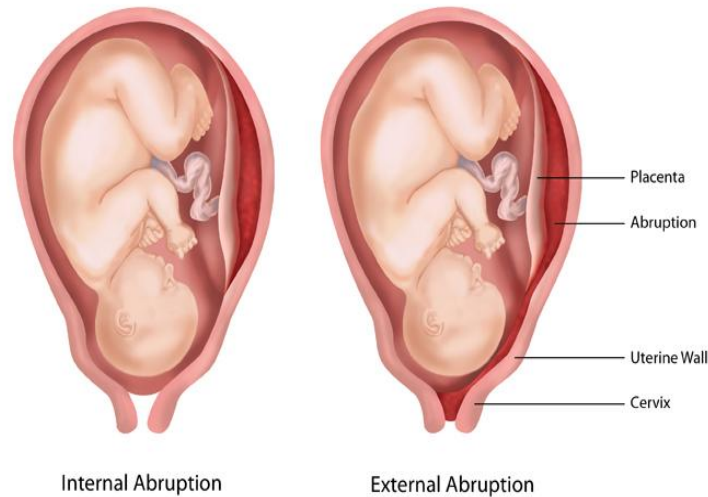


# *North Carolina Women's Hospital*

## **Placental Abruption**



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### ***What is placental abruption?***

The placenta is an organ attached to the inside of the uterus during pregnancy. It is responsible for carrying nutrients and oxygen from the mother to the baby. A placental abruption happens when part or the entire placenta separates from the wall of the uterus before the birth of the baby. This serious condition can be harmful to the baby. Left untreated, placental abruption may put both mother and baby in danger. **Placental abruption is an emergency, requiring immediate medical attention.**

### ***What are the symptoms?***

The symptoms of abruption are not unique to abruption. Serious abruptions almost always have vaginal bleeding and may also include:

- Pain in the abdomen or back, including contractions
- Cramping similar to a menstrual period
- Decreased fetal movement
- Dizziness or feeling like your heart is beating faster than normal.

### ***What causes placental abruption?***

Placental abruption can begin anytime after 20 weeks of pregnancy. The cause of placental abruption is unknown. There are some risk factors for abruption:

- Uncontrolled high blood pressure
- Cigarette smoking

- Cocaine use
- Uncontrolled high blood sugar levels
- Alcohol use during pregnancy
- Injury to the abdomen
- History of a placental abruption in a previous pregnancy
- Multiple gestation pregnancy (twins, triplets)
- Too much amniotic fluid

***How is placental abruption diagnosed and treated?***

When you seek emergency health care due to vaginal bleeding after 20 weeks, your health care provider will try to identify the cause. Your healthcare provider may perform blood work or an ultrasound. The purpose of the blood work is to determine how serious the condition is. If the abruption is mild and the baby is too early to be born, you may be hospitalized for close monitoring of your vaginal bleeding and the baby's heart rate. You may also be given medications to help your baby's lungs mature and to stop contractions. If your bleeding stops and you and your baby are stable, you may be sent home. If you are close to your due date or there is evidence that you or your baby is being harmed by the abruption, your healthcare provider may recommend delivery.

***What are the complications of placental abruption?***

Placental abruption can cause life-threatening problems for both mother and baby. Without prompt treatment, placental abruption may lead to:

- Premature birth
- Your baby being deprived of oxygen
- Maternal bleeding problems
- Maternal and fetal death

***Can I prevent placental abruption?***

You cannot prevent placental abruption. There are some things you can do to lower your chances of having this problem:

- Do not smoke
- Do not use illegal drugs, such as cocaine
- Avoid alcohol during pregnancy.
- Follow your healthcare provider's advice for controlling high blood pressure and other health conditions like diabetes
- Use a seat belt whenever you're in a car to prevent injury

For more information or other concerns talk to your healthcare provider about placental abruption.