Ovarian Hyperstimulation Syndrome Fact Sheet

Definition & Side Effects
Ovarian hyperstimulation syndrome (OHSS) is a condition that can occur when the ovaries are stimulated with medication. It is most often associated with injectable medications that produce high serum estrogen levels and a large number of follicles, but there are no absolute cutoffs, and it can occur even in women who took only oral medications to stimulate their ovaries.

Frustration from prolonged pain and the inability to get comfortable are the most bothersome aspects of OHSS for most individuals. But OHSS must be taken seriously.

In the most common mild form, symptoms of OHSS include weight gain with abdominal bloating and discomfort. When more severe, symptoms may also include:

- Shortness of breath and dizziness
- Rapid pulse
- Excessive weight gain
- Fluid accumulation in the abdomen
- Low blood pressure
- Decreased urine output
- Nausea, occasionally with vomiting

On rare occasions, an enlarged ovarian follicle may rupture. While this can cause severe abdominal pain, it is usually self-limited and soon subsides. Even more rarely, the enlarged ovary may become twisted on its attachment, causing engorgement and pain. Although either of these conditions can necessitate surgery and removal of the ovary, it is extremely rare. Roughly 10 percent of patients undergoing in vitro fertilization (IVF) have mild OHSS, and less than 1 percent of patients need to be admitted to the hospital. Surgery is rarely needed. If necessary for symptom relief, excess fluid may be removed by a catheter introduced into the abdomen.

Prevention
If you have significant risk factors, your doctor may recommend withholding your human chorionic gonadotropin (hCG) injection. This will minimize your risk of developing the more severe forms of OHSS and having multiple pregnancies. However, since the goal is to develop multiple follicles, there is a fine line between too few and too many. Your doctor will make every effort to reduce your chances of developing OHSS, but even with very careful management of your stimulation cycle it may occur.
Treatment
If after receiving hCG you develop any of the symptoms described above, you should notify the office. Although it is very uncommon, severe OHSS may require hospitalization. It is very important if you experience severe abdominal pain, especially combined with vomiting or significant weight gain, that you contact the office so you can be evaluated. While there is no specific treatment, following these instructions may reduce your chances of developing severe OHSS:

1. Take your weight daily and alert the office if it increases by more than 5 pounds. Measure your abdominal girth at the same point (usually the navel) daily and record it. You should keep a daily diary of your symptoms, your weight and girth, and your fluid intake.
2. Drink fluids as directed by your physician. Fluids with some electrolytes (sodium, potassium and chloride) in them are recommended. Gatorade and similar drinks are helpful. Do not drink large amounts of just water. A high salt intake is also not recommended.
3. There are no hard and fast directions for the amount of fluid to take but in general, you should take enough fluid so that you urinate 3-4 times a day. Excessive fluid intake may make your OHSS worse and lead to worsening abdominal distension and rapid weight accumulation. Most women do well with 1.5 to 2 liters of fluid per day.
4. If you’re not nauseated, a diet high in protein may be helpful, as it may keep more fluid in your blood vessels instead of it leaking into your abdominal cavity.
5. Avoid anything that might injure your ovaries (strenuous activity, exercise, intercourse, etc.). While vaginal probe ultrasounds are safe, avoid internal pelvic exams.
6. Avoid tight fitting clothing.
7. Tylenol and heating pads applied to the abdomen are safe to use.
8. Talk to us daily. We are very interested in your progress.
9. There is some increased risk of developing a blood clot if you have OHSS. While not completely preventive, you should continue the baby aspirin until told to stop. While you should avoid strenuous exercise, you should move about regularly to decrease the chances of a serious blood clot developing.
10. The good news is that for many women with OHSS, it may be the first sign of an ongoing pregnancy.

If you have any questions or concerns, call the office. If you are out of town and experience severe pain, go to the nearest emergency room. However, alert them to the fact that your ovaries are enlarged so they will avoid pelvic exams.

Duration
Symptoms of ovarian hyperstimulation syndrome usually resolve spontaneously with the onset of the next period or shortly thereafter. If you are pregnant, the symptoms may worsen somewhat and last approximately two to three weeks.