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OVARIAN HYPERSTIMULATION SYNDROME (OHSS)

What is OHSS?

OHSS is a complication of ovarian stimulation, usually with IVF treatment. It can affect anyone, but most typically occurs in younger women going through IVF or women with polycystic ovary syndrome. OHSS generally occurs when too many follicles (egg sacs) develop. These follicles secrete hormones and chemicals that change the fluid balance in the body. This causes fluid to accumulate in the pelvis and abdomen, causing abdominal pain and bloating. The rest of the body can be relatively dehydrated from all of the fluid shifting to the abdomen. If it is severe, fluid can start to accumulate on the lungs causing shortness of breath.

OHSS gets better of its own accord with time, but the condition can be particularly severe and long lasting if you become pregnant on top of OHSS.

What are the symptoms?

Symptoms of mild OHSS

Abdominal pain
Bloating
Nausea and loss of appetite
Diarrhoea

Symptoms of severe OHSS

Extreme abdominal pain and bloating
Shortness of breath
Passing low volumes of urine
Calf pain and swelling

How can OHSS be treated?

This depends on the stage of the IVF cycle it is detected

If it is detected before trigger, cancellation of the cycle is an option. Another option at this stage is a special type of trigger called an agnoist trigger (only if you are on a "short" or antagonist IVF cycle). It is usually necessary to freeze all of the embryos if you are triggered with an agonist as the lining of the uterus doesn't develop very well.

If OHSS arises after trigger, the best treatment is to freeze all of the embryos so that we don't make the condition worse with a pregnancy. The embryos are not harmed by freezing and can be replaced when you have recovered, normally the next month.

Dostinex is a medication which can help reduce the symptoms of OHSS, I will provide you with a prescription for this if I feel it will be helpful. The dose is 1x 0.5mg tablet daily for 8 days.

Most cases of mild OHSS resolve with simple home treatments (see below)

If severe symptoms develop, or if you have pain that is not tolerable, you may need hospitalisation and/or a procedure to remove some of the fluid from the abdomen.

I have been diagnosed with mild OHSS - what do I do?

The most important aspect is to stay well hydrated with water. Even if your abdomen is feeling really bloated remember the rest of your body can be dehydrated.

Mild to moderate pain can be safely treated with panadol, panadeine or panadeine forte

I recommend weighing yourself and measuring your waist circumference at the same time each day until you are definitely feeling better. Please keep a record of this to discuss with me. Don't worry the weight is all fluid and it will come off in a few weeks!!

Pay attention to the symptoms described above and please contact your nursing team or myself if the situation is getting worse, or if you have any symptoms of severe OHSS.

Kind regards

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'K Rowan', with a stylized, cursive-like flourish at the end.

Dr Katrina Rowan