

Ovarian Hyperstimulation Syndrome (OHSS)

Both IVF and some IUI cycles begin with a process termed controlled ovarian hyperstimulation (COH). The objective in each case is to encourage the ovaries to produce more than one dominant follicle in a given menstrual cycle. This is not associated with any permanent change in physiology. However, some women may experience Ovarian Hyperstimulation Syndrome (OHSS).

This disorder is characterized by a temporary enlargement of the ovaries, and in some cases, fluid accumulation in the abdomen. Symptoms, if they occur, usually peak 5 to 7 days after ovulation (or IVF egg retrieval). The syndrome ranges from mild to severe based on the size of the ovaries, subjective symptoms, and laboratory findings. Symptoms may also worsen or be prolonged with pregnancy due to further stimulation of the ovaries by the hCG hormone produced in early pregnancy.

Implications

Although rare, in severe cases it could require hospitalization and complications may include blood clots, kidney failure, ovarian torsion or rupture, death, or termination of pregnancy. The key point to know is that this is extremely rare and preventable by the careful monitoring with the ultrasounds and blood work required during stimulation cycles with fertility medications.

Symptoms

Mild symptoms of OHSS are relatively common and may include:

- Lower abdominal discomfort
- Abdominal bloating
- Mild nausea

Treatment

OHSS is usually managed on an outpatient basis by restricting activity (resting with your legs elevated) and managing symptoms. We will also ask you to drink your normal amount of fluids (at least four 8 oz glasses of fluid a day) but substitute electrolyte drinks (e.g. Gatorade or Vitamin Water) instead of water to help restore electrolyte balance. You may also have frequent blood tests, physical examinations, and pelvic ultrasounds in the office.

You may be asked to record your daily weight, measure your waist size, and monitor your fluid intake and urine output (see below). The condition will naturally reverse to normal over time, but can take up to several weeks.

In some circumstances it may be necessary to have a procedure to drain fluid from the abdomen. Your physician will discuss this in more detail if your symptoms indicate the need for this procedure.

