



Complications

Toxemia and Toxoplasmosis

Toxemia

Also known as pre-eclampsia, toxemia occurs when poisonous substances are spread throughout the body in the bloodstream. It can happen if the placenta runs short of blood because of unusually high demands, such as in multiple pregnancies or when the arteries in the womb haven't enlarged as they should during the first half of pregnancy.

Toxemia occurs in the later half of pregnancy—after 24 weeks—and is most common in first-time mothers. It's the second leading cause of maternal death and a big reason for fetal growth retardation, preterm labor and infant deaths. If toxemia is not treated properly, it can progress to eclampsia which can result in coma, convulsions and death of the mother.

Warning Signs of Toxemia

- swelling of the hands, feet and face
- “flashing lights” or blurring of vision
- quick weight gain over a short period of time
- rise in blood pressure
- sudden decrease in urination
- albumin (protein) appears in the urine
- headaches

Treatment

Bed rest is an important part of treating toxemia. It's also important to lower stress levels. Stress has been known to produce hormonal changes that can increase blood pressure.

Toxoplasmosis

Cat feces can contain a parasite called toxoplasmosis, which is harmful to a developing fetus. Transmission to humans usually involves exposure to dust from cat litter. Expecting mothers should avoid cleaning cat litter boxes. The feces are infectious, not the cat itself. Some birds and other animals as well as raw fish and undercooked meat can carry toxoplasmosis.

Possible Effects of Toxoplasmosis on the Baby

- low birth weight
- seizures
- jaundice
- mental retardation
- fever
- vision problems

Symptoms of Toxoplasmosis in Adults

Symptoms in adults are fairly mild. They usually appear about two to three weeks after you've been exposed. But some infected adults show no symptoms at all.

- swollen lymph glands
- fever
- in the neck
- headache
- chills
- muscle aches
- fatigue

Treatment

If you or your doctor suspect you have toxoplasmosis, treatment involves taking special antibiotics over a period of several months. This reduces the risk that your baby will be born with any serious problems. The baby can also be tested through amniocentesis or at delivery. Fortunately, only one baby in 10,000 is born with congenital toxoplasmosis.