

## Vanishing Twin Syndrome

With ultrasound, it is now possible to know as early as five or six weeks that you are pregnant. However, with these first trimester, early ultrasounds an interesting side effect has occurred. The early ultrasound confirms two or more fetuses and a subsequent ultrasound reveals the 'disappearance' of at least one of the fetuses and an empty sac may be visible. This 'disappearance' is called *Vanishing Twin*.

Researchers now suspect many more multiples are conceived than previously thought and unexplained bleeding early in the pregnancy may be the miscarriage of a multiple. In the past, women usually had their first ultrasound later in their pregnancy (after 12 weeks pregnant) and therefore would never have known they were carrying multiples. Nowadays the use of early ultrasound (in some cases as early as five weeks pregnant) can confirm a multiple birth pregnancy, while a later ultrasound confirms the loss of one or more of the babies. While not all cases of vanishing twin are associated with bleeding, this may explain why some women experience some cramping, bleeding or passage of tissue early in their pregnancy, but nevertheless the pregnancy continues, is uncomplicated and culminates with the birth of a healthy child(ren).

Vanishing twin can also occur within higher order multiple sets. For example, initial contact was made for registration for multiple birth prenatal classes with a family 8-1/2 weeks pregnant with triplets. When they arrived for the first class at just over 13 weeks pregnant, they advised that a subsequent ultrasound had shown that they were now carrying two babies and an empty sac was visible on the ultrasound. This family had very sad feelings because two other families in the prenatal class were carrying triplets and they should have been part of that group.

It is not uncommon for families with vanishing twin to experience feelings of sadness, grief and loss as they had anticipated and looked forward to a multiple birth. It is not clear why one (or more) fetus fails to develop and is either miscarried or reabsorbed into the mother's system.

### Some Resources on Vanishing Twin Syndrome

- *Twins! Pregnancy, Birth and the First Year of Life*, by Connie. L. Agnew, Alan H. Klein and Jill Alison Ganon, Harper Perennial
- *Multiple Blessings*, by Betty Rothbart, Hearst Books
- *Double Duty*, by Christina Baglivi Tinglof, Contemporary Books
- *Mothering Multiples*, by Karen Kerkhoff Gromada, La Leche League International

- *The Art of Parenting Twins*, Patricia Maxwell Malmstrom and Janet Poland, Ballantine Books

### Additional Resources

- Multiple Births Canada Fact Sheet series, several topics on loss are available.
- *The Loss of a Multiple: Miscarriage, Stillbirth, Infancy*, Multiple Births Canada
- *The Loss of a Multiple: Childhood, Teens*, Multiple Births Canada
- *The Loss of a Multiple: The Role of a Parents of Multiples Club*, Multiples Births Canada

Written by Lynda P. Haddon