



## PATIENT'S FACT SHEET: **PROGESTERONE SUPPLEMENTATION**

After ovulation, the lining of the egg follicle becomes the corpus luteum, and produces progesterone, which prepares the uterine lining to receive the fertilized egg. If there is no pregnancy, the progesterone production stops after about two weeks, and this triggers the uterine lining to be shed, resulting in a period. If pregnancy occurs, the corpus luteum continues to produce progesterone, which is important to the developing pregnancy, for about two more months, at which time the placenta takes over hormone production.

### **What are the reasons for using progesterone supplementation?**

Luteal phase defect This is a condition in which the corpus luteum does not produce sufficient amounts of progesterone after ovulation. This can lead to infertility or early pregnancy loss.

During gonadotropin-stimulated cycles This is done for added insurance, and to leave as little as possible to Mother Nature after undergoing the stress and expense of a stimulated cycle.

Low progesterone levels during pregnancy The vast majority of miscarriages occur because the pregnancy is not normal from the time of conception, and in these cases, there is no role for progesterone supplementation. Rarely, however, healthy pregnancies can be lost if progesterone levels are low, thereby causing the uterine lining to be unable to support the pregnancy.

### **Is it safe to take progesterone supplements during pregnancy?**

The supplements we prescribe contain the exact same molecule that the ovary normally produces. Other than occasional nausea, bloating, or tiredness (the same symptoms that many pregnant women have!), there are no known side effects to the mother or baby.

### **How is progesterone supplementation given?**

We generally prescribe vaginal suppositories (they can also be used rectally). This results in high levels of progesterone being delivered directly to the uterine lining. Rarely, we may prescribe injections or oral medication. The suppositories are not available commercially, but are made by compounding pharmacies, of which there are several in the greater Nashua area. Let the pharmacist know if you will be using them rectally, as a different base may be used. They are usually used twice a day, and during pregnancy, are usually continued until about the 12<sup>th</sup> or 13<sup>th</sup> week, at which time the placenta takes over progesterone production.

### **A few "rules of the road":**

- If you are doing gonadotropin-stimulated cycles, start the suppositories the day after IUI.
- Store in refrigerator. If you are traveling, use a thermos or insulated bag.
- Don't run out! Because they need to be compounded, it may take a day or two to get new ones. Call your pharmacist in advance for refills.
- When using vaginally, gently push the suppository up beside your cervix. Use a small amount of water-soluble gel (K-Y, etc.) if needed. If you feel cramping, you may be accidentally pushing it into the cervical opening.
- Do not insert a tampon or anything else into the vagina as it may absorb the medication. Having intercourse is fine, but you will absorb the progesterone better if you have intercourse either before or more than 45 minutes after inserting the suppository.

- When using rectally, use water-soluble gel and push the suppository in just past the sphincter.
- You need to retain the vaginal or rectal suppository for 45 minutes to maximize absorption, so lie down for that length of time. You may want to wake up an hour early, insert the morning suppository, and go back to bed for 45 minutes. It's best to insert the evening one at bedtime.
- If you experience nausea or bloating, try eating small frequent protein-rich meals.
- If you don't conceive, menses may be delayed. This is because normally, menses begin because dropping progesterone levels trigger shedding of the uterine lining.

**Questions?**

If you are a patient of our Fertility Program, feel free to call us at 603-577-FERT (577-3378) if you have a question.

If you have not been a patient of our Fertility Program, and are taking progesterone suppositories because of a pregnancy-related problem, please use our main phone number, 603-882-0555.