Isolated Single Umbilical Artery

You have learned from your ultrasound examination that an isolated single umbilical artery (SUA), also known as a two vessel cord, has been identified. This is a common ultrasound finding, and this fact sheet will provide you with information about a SUA and answer the most commonly asked questions.

What is a Single Umbilical Artery (SUA)?

The umbilical cord is the tube-like structure that connects the baby to the placenta. The umbilical cord usually contains three blood vessels; a single vein and 2 arteries. The vein carries oxygen from the placenta to the fetus, while the arteries carry waste products from the fetus to the placenta. In some cases, only one umbilical artery develops.

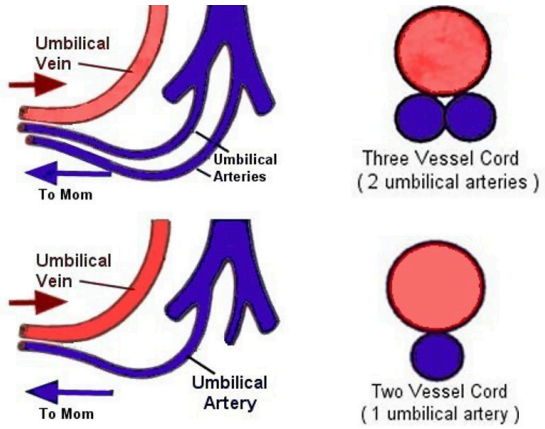

Diagram courtesy of obfocus.com.

How Does a SUA occur?

All umbilical cords begin with three vessels. Occasionally, one umbilical artery fails to develop. When this occurs, only the umbilical vein and one umbilical artery remain. This is referred to as a single umbilical artery (SUA) or a two vessel cord. An isolated SUA occurs in approximately 1% (1 in every one hundred) of singleton pregnancies, in up to 4.6% of twin pregnancies.

Do I need to be concerned about SUA?

When the ultrasound is otherwise normal, this finding is not associated with an increased risk for a chromosome abnormality. Most babies with SUA develop normally throughout pregnancy. Occasionally, SUA can cause babies to have issues with their growth. It is recommended to have an ultrasound in the third trimester of pregnancy for this reason. In addition, starting at 36 weeks, you may be offered weekly testing that includes a non-stress test.

Please remember that this is a common finding in pregnancy. If you would like to discuss this further, a counselor is available at 781-624-5041.

Thank you for choosing Maternal Fetal Medicine at South Shore Hospital.