

Patient Information

Ectopic pregnancy, including risk factors, complications and management

Introduction:

An ectopic pregnancy is a pregnancy that develops outside the uterus, usually in the fallopian tube, but sometimes other organs like the ovary or even the cervix (neck of the womb). It cannot continue normally and can cause serious health problems for the woman. An ectopic pregnancy needs to be treated as soon as possible.

Risks:

Anyone who can get pregnant can have an ectopic pregnancy, but some factors may increase the chance of having one, such as:

- Previous ectopic pregnancy
- Previous pelvic infection or surgery
- Fertility treatment such as IVF
- Damaged fallopian tubes
- Using an IUD or progestogen-only pill
- Smoking
- Age over 40

Complications

An ectopic pregnancy can cause severe pain, bleeding and shock if the fallopian tube ruptures. This is a medical emergency that requires urgent surgery. Sometimes, an ectopic pregnancy can also affect future fertility and increase the risk of another ectopic pregnancy.

Management:

There are three main options for treating an ectopic pregnancy, depending on your condition and preferences. They are:

Surgery: This involves removing the ectopic pregnancy through a small cut in your abdomen, either through laparoscopic surgery or open operation. Sometimes, part or whole of the fallopian tube may also need to be removed.

Medication: This involves taking a drug called methotrexate, which stops the growth of the ectopic pregnancy. It is given as an injection and may take several weeks to work. You will need regular blood tests to monitor your progress and may need more than one dose. Rarely it might not work.

Wait and see: This involves monitoring your symptoms and hormone levels to see if the ectopic pregnancy resolves on its own. This option is only suitable for some women who have no signs of internal bleeding and low hormone levels.

Your doctor will discuss these options with you and help you make an informed decision. You may also need emotional support and counselling to cope with the loss of your pregnancy.



Sources:

Ectopic pregnancy | The Royal Women's Hospital: <https://www.thewomens.org.au/health-information/pregnancy-and-birth/pregnancy-problems/early-pregnancy-problems/ectopic-pregnancy/>

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Ectopic pregnancy- Patient Information Brochures- Mater Group: <https://brochures.mater.org.au/brochures/mater-mothers-hospital/ectopic-pregnancy>

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Ectopic Pregnancy, Miscarriage & PUL- Home | SA Health: <https://www.sahealth.sa.gov.au/wps/wcm/connect/fead0f004ee4554cb7ecbfd150ce4f37/Ectopic-pregnancy-WCHN-PPG-01092008.pdf?MOD=AJPERES>

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Types of ectopic pregnancy

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