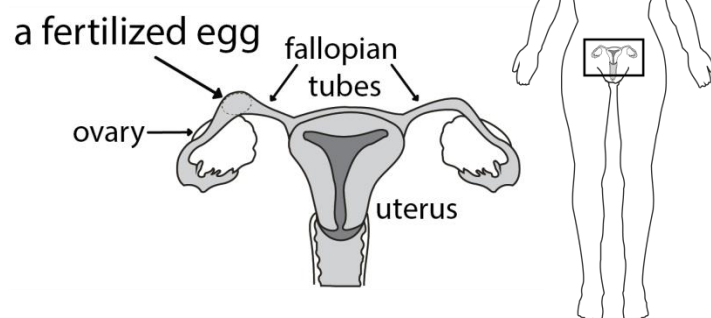


## Ectopic Pregnancy and Methotrexate

### What is an ectopic pregnancy?

The normal place for a pregnancy to grow is inside the uterus. An ectopic pregnancy is when the fertilized egg has implanted outside the uterus.



The most common place for an ectopic pregnancy is in a fallopian tube. If the pregnancy continues to grow here, the tiny fallopian tube can burst open. A burst fallopian tube results in serious and possibly life-threatening internal bleeding.

To protect you, the ectopic pregnancy must be ended. After consulting with a specialist (an obstetrician/gynecologist), we have given you a medicine called 'methotrexate' to end your ectopic pregnancy. We inject the medicine into a muscle. Most women only need 1 treatment to end the ectopic pregnancy. Sometimes a 2<sup>nd</sup> treatment is needed.

### How does this medicine work?

Methotrexate stops the growth of all rapidly dividing cells. In the case of an ectopic pregnancy, it stops the egg from growing.

### What to expect after we give methotrexate

- 5 to 7 days after being given methotrexate, it is common to have mild to moderate abdominal (belly) pain for 1 to 2 days.
- You will have vaginal bleeding or spotting, similar to a heavy period.
- You might feel sick, throw up, or have diarrhea.
- You might feel very tired and/or lightheaded.
- You might get a skin rash after being in the sun.

### When to get help

#### Call 9-1-1 if:

- You have very heavy vaginal bleeding, soaking more than 1 pad each hour.
- You have really bad abdominal (belly) pain that gets worse or does not go away with pain medicine. The pain might also be in the rectal area or up into the shoulders.
- You suddenly feel faint or feel like passing out (loss of consciousness).

### Remember

An ectopic pregnancy is not a normal pregnancy, and would not result in a live birth.

## How to care for yourself

Until the pregnancy has ended, **you must do the following:**

- **Use pads**, not tampons to manage vaginal bleeding.
- **Stop taking folic acid** and vitamins with folic acid in them (such as prenatal vitamins). Folic acid can lessen the effect of the methotrexate.
- **Keep out of the sun** if you can. Wear sunscreen and protective clothing as needed.
- **Do not** drink alcohol until the ectopic pregnancy has ended. With methotrexate, alcohol could increase the chances of liver problems.
- **Do not** have vaginal intercourse until your pregnancy hormone level is zero and your doctor has told you it is safe.
- **Try not** to take any of these medicines for 7 days after your injection: ibuprofen (Advil, Motrin, store brand), naproxen (Naprosyn, Aleve, store brand), acetylsalicylic acid (Aspirin).

## To protect yourself and others

Methotrexate leaves your body through body fluids. To prevent others from accidentally coming into contact with your body fluids, for 48 hours after receiving methotrexate:

- Flush the toilet twice after each use.
- Wash any droplets of urine off of the toilet seat.
- Wash your hands well after using the toilet and before handling food.

Small amounts of methotrexate do pass into breastmilk. For 24 hours after methotrexate, pump and throw away your breastmilk.

## To manage your pain

The mild to moderate pain should go away over 2 to 7 days. To help with any pain and cramping:

- Take 1000mg of acetaminophen (Tylenol or store brand) every 4 to 6 hours as needed (but no more than 4000mg in 24 hours).
- Take pain medicine prescribed by your doctor.
- Place a hot water bottle or heating pad on your abdomen.

## Follow up

For your health and safety, it is **extremely important** that you:

- Go and get all the blood tests
- See the specialist listed below to review the results of your blood tests.

**Blood tests** help your doctor check that your pregnancy hormone levels (also called HCG levels) are decreasing. A steady decrease in your HCG levels tells your doctor the methotrexate is working. When your HCG levels reach zero, it means your pregnancy has ended.

Blood tests must be done on Day 4, Day 7, and then every week until your HCG level is zero.

**The specialist** checks to make sure the methotrexate worked and makes sure you have not had any complications from either the medicine or the pregnancy.

If your HCG levels do not reach zero, the specialist might repeat the methotrexate or arrange for you to have surgery to remove the ectopic pregnancy.

Follow up with Dr. \_\_\_\_\_  
on \_\_\_\_\_ (Date).

- To learn more, it's good to ask:**
- Your family doctor
  - Your pharmacist
  - HealthLinkBC 8-1-1 (or 7-1-1 for deaf and hearing impaired) or go online to [www.HealthLinkBC.ca](http://www.HealthLinkBC.ca)