

# Medical treatment for an ectopic pregnancy

---

**This leaflet explains the risks and benefits of having medical treatment (an injection of a medication called Methotrexate) for ectopic pregnancy (a pregnancy outside of the womb).**

---

## What is medical treatment and how effective is it?

The Methotrexate injection is given in the muscle of your leg or buttock to treat the ectopic pregnancy by stopping its growth. Methotrexate works for 65-95% of suitable patients.

## What is Methotrexate?

Methotrexate is sold (has a licence) to treat many illnesses such as psoriasis and rheumatoid arthritis. It works by stopping fast growing cells. This is why it has been **safely and successfully used for many years** to treat ectopic pregnancies.

## Methotrexate is not licensed to treat ectopic pregnancies.

### What does this mean?

- Medicines are usually sold to treat (carry a licence for) a specific disease/condition.
- Some medicines are found to be safe and effective for more than one condition.
- Medicine manufacturers do not always apply for a licence for all of the conditions that the medicine can be used for.
- Doctors can still use these medicines for different conditions as long as the patient understands that there is no licence for that use.
- For example, Methotrexate is licensed to treat psoriasis. It is known to be safe and effective in the treatment of ectopic pregnancies, but does not carry a licence for this treatment.

## How else can ectopic pregnancy be treated?

Many women will not fit the strict criteria for medical treatment of ectopic pregnancy and are offered an operation (laparoscopy). Some patients (who fit certain criteria) are given the option of seeing if the ectopic pregnancy will resolve on its own.

## What are the benefits of medical treatment?

- You can go home after the injection.
- Most women will avoid an operation and all of its risks.
- You will avoid a general anaesthetic.

## What are the disadvantages of medical treatment?

- Medical treatment can fail for 15% of women.
- This can mean an emergency operation to treat the ectopic and sometimes to treat internal bleeding from a ruptured ectopic.
- The clinic will have to monitor you closely, which means regular visits to the hospital for up to 7 weeks.
- **It is very important to remember that you should not try to get pregnant for at least 3 months after the treatment and follow-up have ended.**
- The medical treatment can produce side effects.

## What are the possible side effects of methotrexate?

The side effects are usually mild and are not seen in everyone.

- Nausea (feeling sick)
- Vomiting
- Sore mouth.
- Tiredness
- Vaginal bleeding, like a period will be seen in most women.
- Abdominal (tummy) pain in the first week after treatment is common. This can occasionally be severe and we ask that you call the Early Pregnancy Unit on **0118 322 7181** at any time if this happens.

## Will I have to come to the clinic for follow up?

- You will need close monitoring after the injection.
- We will see you 1-2 times per week in the Early Pregnancy Unit.
- You will need blood tests in the clinic until the ectopic has been fully treated.
- It can take up to 7 weeks for full treatment.

## Important advice during treatment

During treatment you must avoid:

- Alcohol
- Folic acid – as it can cause the treatment to fail
- Sexual intercourse – this may rupture the ectopic pregnancy and cause severe internal bleeding
- Heavy lifting and housework

## What about future pregnancies?

- Most women go on to have successful pregnancies after an ectopic pregnancy.
- The chance of having a normal pregnancy after Methotrexate treatment is the same as after surgical treatment.

- The chance of having another ectopic in future pregnancies is about 1-2 in 10 women. This is roughly the same for women treated with Methotrexate or surgery.
- It is very important not to get pregnant for at least 3 months after Methotrexate treatment and follow-up have ended.

### For more information

#### Early Pregnancy Unit (on Sonning Ward)

Level 5

#### Maternity Block

**Tel: 0118 322 7181** (emergency number available at all times).

The clinic is open Mon – Fri between 7.30am and 8.00pm

Out of hours and at weekends, you can also contact Sonning Ward, Tel: 0118 322 7195.

Visit NHS website at: <http://www.nhs.uk/Conditions/Ectopic-pregnancy/Pages/Treatment.aspx>

To find out more about our Trust visit [www.royalberkshire.nhs.uk](http://www.royalberkshire.nhs.uk)

**Please ask if you need this information in another language or format.**

Gynaecology (EPAGU), September 2017

Reviewed: October 2022

Next review due: October 2024