

Ectopic Pregnancy and Use of Methotrexate

An ectopic pregnancy happens outside of the uterus. Only a pregnancy inside the uterus can grow and develop into a healthy baby.

Cells rapidly divide during pregnancy. Methotrexate is a medication that slows or stops fast-growing cells. To treat ectopic pregnancy, the clinician will give methotrexate by injection, or shot, in the hospital, clinic or physician's office. In some cases, they can inject methotrexate directly into the ectopic pregnancy.

If you have any questions, please call your physician's office.

Before you get methotrexate

Be sure to tell your physician if you:

- Are allergic to methotrexate.
- Have immune system disorders, such as lupus.
- Have liver disease, kidney disease or anemia (decreased number of red blood cells).
- Are breastfeeding. If you are breastfeeding, talk to your physician about other feeding options. Do not restart breastfeeding until your physician tells you that you may do so.
- Are taking any medications or supplements.

Number of methotrexate injections

You may get methotrexate as a single injection (Day 1) or as a set of 2 injections (Day 1 and Day 4). Your physician will choose the best treatment for you.

What to expect

After receiving methotrexate, you may have mild nausea, bloating and diarrhea. Several days later, pregnancy hormones start to decrease. This may cause bleeding much like your menstrual period.

Blood tests

You will have blood tests to see how the methotrexate is working. The tests will measure the human chorionic gonadotropin (hCG) hormone levels in your body. The hCG hormone level drops as the placenta shrinks. After getting methotrexate (Day 1), you will have blood drawn on:

- Day 4
- Day 7

If the methotrexate is working and your hCG levels decrease as expected, you will then need to have blood drawn once a week until your hCG returns to a non-pregnant level. This often takes 3 to 4 weeks. Sometimes more doses of methotrexate are needed.

It is important that you complete these blood tests as ordered by your physician.

If the methotrexate does not work, you may need surgery. Your physician will talk with you about this in more detail with you.

Medications and foods to avoid

Until your hCG has fallen to a non-pregnant level:

- Stop taking prenatal vitamins containing folic acid/folate.
- Do not take proton pump inhibitors (PPIs) such as omeprazole (Prilosec®), esomeprazole magnesium (Nexium®), pantoprazole sodium (Protonix®) or lansoprazole (Prevacid®).
- Do not drink alcohol.
- Avoid foods high in folate such as leafy green vegetables, beans, peas, lentils and oranges.
- Do not take penicillin antibiotics.
- Do not take nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) such as ibuprofen (Advil®, Motrin®), naproxen (Aleve®) or aspirin.

Activity limits

Certain activities may cause bleeding into your abdomen. Follow these guidelines until your physician tells you otherwise.

- Do not have sexual intercourse.
- Do not do aerobic exercise, such as bicycling, fast walking, jogging or swimming.
- Do not lift anything more than 20 pounds.

Side effects

Common side effects of methotrexate include:

- Upset stomach or nausea
- Decreased appetite
- Diarrhea
- Headache
- Sore throat
- Mouth sores
- Increased chance of getting an infection
- Skin sensitivity to sunlight and ultraviolet light

When to call your physician

Call your physician's office right away if you have any of these symptoms:

- A sign of an allergic reaction such as itching, swelling of your face or hands or tingling in your throat
- Blistering or red skin rash
- Dark colored urine or pale stools
- A temperature more than 100.2 degrees F with chills, sore throat or body aches
- Loss of appetite
- Severe nausea, vomiting or diarrhea
- Yellowing of the skin or eyes
- Mouth sores
- Sudden onset or increase of abdominal, pelvic or shoulder pain
- Vaginal bleeding that is heavy enough to soak through 1 pad every half hour for 2 hours in a row
- Feeling lightheaded, dizzy or like you might pass out

Call 911 or go to the nearest emergency department if you have these symptoms:

- **Trouble breathing or shortness of breath**

Contact information

If you have any of the above symptoms or are just not sure about a symptom, please call your physician's office.

For all emergencies, call 911.