Ectopic Pregnancy and Use of Methotrexate

Methotrexate

Methotrexate is a medicine that slows or stops the production of fast-growing cells. Because pregnancy cells rapidly divide, methotrexate can be used to treat ectopic pregnancy. An ectopic pregnancy occurs outside of the uterus. Only a pregnancy inside the uterus can grow and develop into a healthy baby. Methotrexate is given by injection, or shot, which is done in the hospital, clinic or doctor’s office. This drug is also used for other conditions, such as cancer.

Before Receiving this Medicine

Be sure to tell your doctor if you:

■ Are allergic to methotrexate.
■ Have immune system problems, such as lupus.
■ Have liver disease, kidney disease, anemia (decreased number of red blood cells).
■ Are breastfeeding. If you are breastfeeding, talk to your doctor about other feeding options. Do not resume breastfeeding until you have been cleared by your doctor.
■ Are taking any medications or supplements.

What to Expect

After receiving this medicine, many women have mild nausea, bloating, and diarrhea. Several days later, pregnancy hormones begin to decrease. This may cause bleeding that resembles a menstrual period.

Blood Tests

Blood tests are done to see how the medicine is working. The test will measure your human chorionic gonadotropin (hCG) hormone level which decreases as the placenta cells die. After getting the medicine (Day 1), you will need to 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 tests once a week until your hCG level returns to a non-pregnant level. This often takes 3 to 4 weeks. Sometimes more than 1 dose of methotrexate is needed.

It is important that you have these blood tests as ordered.
If the medicine does not work, surgery may be needed. Your doctor will discuss this in more detail with you.

**Medication**
Until hCG levels have fallen to a non-pregnant state, **do not take**:
- Prenatal vitamins or vitamins containing folic acid.
- Alcohol.
- Penicillin antibiotics.
- Nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory agents (NSAIDS) such as ibuprofen (Advil®, Motrin®), naproxen (Aleve®), or aspirin.
- Proton-pump inhibitors such as omeprazole (Prilosec®), esomeprazole (Nexium®), pantoprazole (Protonix®), or lansoprazole (Prevacid®).

**Activity**
Certain activities may cause bleeding into your abdomen. Until cleared by your doctor, do not:
- Have intercourse.
- Engage in aerobic exercise, such as bicycling, fast walking or jogging or swimming.
- Lift anything greater than 20 lbs.

**Side Effects**
Common side effects of methotrexate include:
- Increased chance of getting an infection.
- Upset stomach.
- Decreased appetite.
- Nausea and/or diarrhea.
- Headache.
- Sore throat.

**When to Call Your Doctor**
Call your doctor right away if you note any of the following:
- A sign of an allergic reaction: itching, swelling of the face or hands, tingling in the throat, trouble breathing.
- Blistering or red skin rash.
- Dark colored urine or pale stools.
- Fever over 100.2° F., chills, sore throat, body aches.
- Severe nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, abdominal pain, or loss of appetite.
- Confusion, trouble seeing, headache, fainting, or dizziness.
- Unusual bruising, bleeding or weakness.
- Yellowing of the skin or eyes.
- Mouth sores.
- Shortness of breath or trouble breathing.
- Sudden increase in abdominal/pelvic pain or shoulder pain.

**Northwestern Medicine – Health Information Resources**

For more information, contact Northwestern Memorial Hospital’s Alberto Culver Health Learning Center (HLC) at hlc@nm.org, or by calling 312.926.5465. You may also visit the HLC on the 3rd floor, Galter Pavilion at 251 E. Huron St., Chicago, IL. Health information professionals can help you find the information you need and provide you with personal support at no charge.

For more information about Northwestern Medicine, please visit our website at nm.org.

*Para asistencia en español, por favor llamar al Departamento de Representantes para Pacientes al 312.926.3112.*

The entities that come together as Northwestern Medicine are committed to representing the communities we serve, fostering a culture of inclusion, delivering culturally competent care, providing access to treatment and programs in a nondiscriminatory manner and eliminating healthcare disparities. For questions, please call either Northwestern Memorial Hospital’s Patient Representatives Department at 312.926.3112, TDD/TTY 312.926.6363, the Northwestern Lake Forest Patient Relations manager at 847.535.8282 and/or the Northwestern Medical Group Patient Representatives Department at 312.695.1100, TDD/TTY 312.926.6363.

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