

Ectopic Pregnancy and Use of Methotrexate

An ectopic pregnancy occurs 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 medicine that slows or stops the production of fast-growing cells. To treat ectopic pregnancy, methotrexate is given by injection, or shot, in the hospital, clinic or physician's office.

*If you have
any questions,
please call
your physician.*

Before receiving 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 resume breastfeeding until you have been cleared by your physician.
- Are taking any medications or supplements.

What to expect

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

Blood tests

Blood tests are done to see how the methotrexate is working. The tests will measure your human chorionic gonadotropin (hCG) hormone levels, which decrease as the placenta cells die. 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 than 1 dose of methotrexate is 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 discuss 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 or 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.

Activity limits

Certain activities may cause bleeding into your abdomen. Until cleared by your physician:

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

Side effects

Common side effects of methotrexate include:

- Headache
- Sore throat
- Increased chance of getting an infection
- Upset stomach or nausea
- Decreased appetite
- Diarrhea

When to call your physician

Call your physician right away if you have:

- Loss of appetite
- Severe nausea, vomiting or diarrhea
- 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

Contact information

If you have any of the above symptoms, please call our office at 312.695.7382. You will speak with the answering service who will connect you with a triage nurse or page the on-call physician. They will have you come to Prentice Women's Hospital Obstetrical Triage Unit (located on the 1st floor of the hospital), if necessary.

- For all other questions, call our office at 312.695.7382.
- Submit messages that are not urgent, such as paperwork requests, through NM MyChart. We may take 2 business days to respond to NM MyChart messages. NM MyChart should be used for non-urgent messages only.
- **For all emergencies, call 911.**