



HUTT maternity

Hutt Valley Maternity Care

Methotrexate use in ectopic pregnancy

Information for women

What is ectopic pregnancy?

An ectopic pregnancy is a pregnancy that is growing outside of the uterus (womb). It is a pregnancy, which cannot survive but poses significant risk to the health of the mother because it can rupture – causing considerable bleeding and pain.

How are ectopic pregnancies treated?

Until recently all ectopic pregnancies were treated by having an operation to remove the pregnancy. This could involve loss or damage to the fallopian tube in which the ectopic pregnancy was growing. Today some ectopic pregnancies can be managed using drug therapy and therefore a general anaesthetic and surgery can be avoided.

What is Methotrexate?

Methotrexate is a drug which is being increasingly used in the management of ectopic pregnancies. It is administered as a single injection into the buttock. Very occasionally women require a second dose.

Is Methotrexate safe?

Studies have shown that following the administration of Methotrexate there is no increased risk of miscarriage or congenital abnormalities in subsequent pregnancies.

Once Methotrexate has been administered you may experience some abdominal

discomfort, which is due to the normal action of Methotrexate on the ectopic pregnancy. This abdominal discomfort can be relieved by taking paracetamol or other pain killers (but not Ibuprofen)

If however the abdominal pain you experience is severe it could be due to internal bleeding and the ectopic rupturing. So if your pain is moderate to severe you must seek medical attention.

What are the advantages of Methotrexate?

If Methotrexate is successful, surgery can be avoided. This means:

- No need for a general anaesthetic
- No need for surgery on the fallopian tubes – so there is a better chance of normal fertility
- No need for a hospital admission

What are the disadvantages of Methotrexate?

- A small risk of side effects
- A small risk of subsequently needing surgery (5-10%)
- More follow up care is required (on average 5 weeks)

What are the side effects of Methotrexate?

More common side effects are:

- Abdominal pain. Cramping abdominal pain is the most common side effect, and it usually occurs during the first 2 to 3 days of treatment. Because abdominal pain is also a sign of a ruptured ectopic pregnancy, report

any abdominal pain to your health professional.

- Vaginal bleeding or spotting.
- Nausea, vomiting, and indigestion.
- Fatigue, lightheadedness, or dizziness.

Rarer side effects are:

- Mouth ulcers
- Conjunctivitis
- Diarrhoea and vomiting
- Skin rashes
- A dry cough
- Abnormal liver function tests

Preparing for the administration of Methotrexate

If you decide to have Methotrexate, you must have blood tests taken before the injection is administered. The blood tests we need to perform include:

- A full blood count
- Kidney function tests (because Methotrexate is removed from the body via the kidneys)
- Liver function tests
- B-HCG (hormone level measured during early pregnancy)

Height and Weight

We need to record your height and weight as this will help us determine the amount of Methotrexate that you will need.