

# Methotrexate Treatment of Ectopic Pregnancy

## PATIENT INFORMATION SHEET

### What is an ectopic pregnancy?

An ectopic pregnancy occurs when a very early pregnancy (embryo) implants at a site other than the inside wall of the uterus. As the pregnancy grows in the wrong place, it stretches the tissue, which may eventually burst (rupture). A ruptured ectopic will tear nearby blood vessels and may lead to life threatening blood loss.

Embryos that do not implant in the uterine wall are unable to develop normally. So it is generally not possible for an ectopic pregnancy to result in a live birth.

One way to stop an ectopic pregnancy from growing is with a medication called methotrexate. Another option is to perform surgery to remove the pregnancy. Treatment with methotrexate avoids the inherent risks of surgery and pain and recovery after surgery. However treatment with methotrexate requires longer follow-up and more visits and bloodwork. The chance of preserving the tube, ending up with an open tube, having a repeat ectopic pregnancy or having a future pregnancy is no different comparing methotrexate to tube sparing surgery. Surgery is required when urgent treatment is necessary or if methotrexate is not successful.

### What is methotrexate?

Methotrexate works by destroying fast growing cells. In an ectopic pregnancy, methotrexate stops the growth of the embryo and the ectopic pregnancy gradually disappears.

### What are the side effects of methotrexate?

The side effects of methotrexate are rare when the medication is used for one or two doses, but may include:

- Nausea (feeling sick to your stomach), vomiting (throwing up), loss of appetite
- Diarrhea (watery bowel movements)
- Sores in the mouth
- Eyesight changes, discomfort and irritation
- Increased sensitivity to the sun

### What can I expect during methotrexate treatment?

- You may feel mild abdomen pain around day 3 and 4 after the injection. Take acetaminophen to relieve pain.
- You may get mouth sores. To prevent mouth sores, use a soft toothbrush and perform regular and careful dental care.
- You can expect to have vaginal spotting or bleeding.

### Procedure for methotrexate treatment for ectopic

- You will receive methotrexate as an injection into a muscle (day 1).
- You will have a blood test 3 days after the injection (day 4) to measure the pregnancy hormone levels (hCG).
- You will have a blood test and ultrasound 6 days after the first injection (day 7) and be seen by the doctor.
- Depending on your bloodwork result you may require a second dose of methotrexate on day 4 or day 7.
- You will continue to have bloodwork every 1 to 2 weeks until the hCG is in the non-pregnant level.  
This may take up to 8 weeks depending on how fast your levels drop.

**IT IS VERY IMPORTANT TO KEEP YOUR FOLLOW-UP APPOINTMENTS IN ORDER TO ENSURE THAT METHOTREXATE IS WORKING ADEQUATELY.**

### Call the Southlake Prenatal Clinic at 905-895-4521 ext. 2724 if you have:

- A fever over 38 degrees Celsius or 100.4 degrees Fahrenheit
- Fatigue or light-headedness

### **CALL 911 OR HAVE SOMEONE DRIVE YOU TO THE NEAREST EMERGENCY DEPARTMENT IF YOU HAVE:**

- Sudden onset or sudden increase of severe abdomen pain not relieved by acetaminophen.
- Heavy vaginal bleeding (if bleeding soaks through 2 or more large maxi pads per hour for more than 2 hours)
- Dizziness with fainting or racing heart rate
- Frequent or prolonged nosebleeds, blood in your urine, black stools or easy bruising

### What should I avoid during the treatment?

- Do not have sexual intercourse. You may rupture the fallopian tube.
- Do not use tampons or douches. You may get an infection
- Do not take pain relievers such as aspirin, ibuprofen (Advil, Motrin), naproxen (Aleve) as these can promote bleeding.
- Do not take vitamins that contain folic acid, including multivitamins. Folic acid prevents methotrexate from working properly.
- Avoid alcohol. You may increase your risk of side effects.
- Avoid direct contact with the sun for the first 2 to 3 days after the injection. Your skin may be more sensitive to the sun.

### How long does the treatment take?

Your pregnancy hormone will usually go back to non pregnant levels by 4 weeks but can take up to 8 weeks.

### When can I get pregnant again?

You need to wait at least 3 months before trying to conceive again. Methotrexate does not cause a decrease in future fertility.

### What do I do in my next pregnancy?

Anyone with a previous ectopic pregnancy is at higher risk of having another ectopic pregnancy. Please call and inform your doctor as soon as you find out you are pregnant so that your doctor can order ultrasound and bloodwork to make sure that the pregnancy is situated in the uterus.

**FIRST FOLLOW UP APPOINTMENT DATE AND TIME:** \_\_\_\_\_

**SECOND FOLLOW UP APPOINTMENT DATE AND TIME:** \_\_\_\_\_

If you have any questions please feel free to call the Southlake Early Pregnancy Loss Clinic  
Monday thru Friday 8am - 4pm at 905-895-4521 ext. 2724.