



A guide to...

Surgical Management of Ectopic Pregnancy

Patient Information

How to contact us

Gynaecology Day Assessment Unit
Watford General Hospital
West Hertfordshire Hospitals NHS Trust
Vicarage Road, Watford, Hertfordshire, WD 18 0HB

Tel: 01923 244366. Ext: 7344. Email: westherts.epu@nhs.net

If you need this leaflet in another language, large print, Braille or audio version, please call **01923 217 198** or email **westherts.pals@nhs.net**



Author	Gynaecology Department
Ratified / Review Date	August 2023 / August 2026
ID Number	28/2139/V2



We are very sorry that you have had an ectopic pregnancy diagnosed. We hope this information is useful for you while you are recovering from your operation.

What is an ectopic pregnancy?

An ectopic pregnancy is when the pregnancy occurs outside the uterus (womb). This normally happens in the fallopian tube but can be at other sites.

How common is it?

Ectopic pregnancy occurs in 1:100 (1%) of all pregnancies.

Why does this happen?

Often the cause is not known, however if you have had damage to your fallopian tubes (by previous infection or surgery) then ectopic pregnancy is more likely to happen.

Is it possible that an ectopic pregnancy can be moved into the uterus (womb)?

This has been tried, but unfortunately not successfully.

Is an ectopic pregnancy dangerous?

Most of the time, ectopic pregnancies can be managed safely by either close observation, injections or surgery (depending on the stage of the pregnancy). However, if not recognised or treated appropriately, it can be dangerous causing internal bleeding.

What happened during the operation?

The doctor will explain what happened during the operation and whether or not your fallopian tube was removed and what the other tube looked like. This will help to give you more information about the chances of future pregnancies. The two most common operations are laparoscopy (keyhole surgery) with three to four small holes in your tummy, or laparotomy (open surgery) with a bigger cut in your tummy.

Do I have to have any stitches removed?

If you have had a laparoscopy (keyhole surgery) usually the stitches are dissolvable and don't need to be removed. If you have had a laparotomy (open surgery) they may be dissolvable but may not. You should be told which before you leave the hospital and arrangements made to have the stitches removed if necessary - usually with your family doctor or a nurse at the surgery.

How long will it take me to recover?

It depends upon what type of operation you had and how much blood you lost. If you had a laparoscopy (keyhole) then the physical recovery is usually quite quick, and you should be getting back to normal activities in one to two weeks. If you had a laparotomy (bigger cut) then it takes a bit longer to get back to normal activities, four to six weeks.

How long does the bleeding last?

It is usual to have some vaginal bleeding after the operation. This can be quite heavy to begin with, but then it should get lighter - like the tail end of a period. You should not use tampons for the bleeding, just pads. It is normal to experience some tummy cramps and even some small clots after the operation, but if the bleeding becomes very heavy or the pain very severe or if you have an unpleasant smelling discharge, you should see your family doctor as you may need antibiotics.

When do I get my period again?

Your periods should return within four to six weeks, but this does vary.

Do I need anti-D?

If your blood group is rhesus negative, yes you do need anti-D before you go home once you have had an operation for an ectopic pregnancy.

What are my chances of getting pregnant again?

This depends upon whether the fallopian tube was removed and whether the other tube looked healthy at the time of the operation. If the other tube did look healthy, the chances of having a pregnancy in the right place next time are about 6 in 10 (60%). However, if the other tube looked damaged at the time of the operation, the chances will be much lower.

When can I try again?

There is no “right” time to start trying again, but we would advise waiting at least three months after an ectopic pregnancy before trying for a baby again and until you both feel ready. It is important to use contraception to avoid getting pregnant during this time as it is possible to conceive again straight away.

Will it happen again?

The chances of a pregnancy in the right place the next time are good as long as the other tube looks healthy. However, there is a chance (1 in 10) of having an ectopic pregnancy again. Stopping smoking and reducing your alcohol intake both increase your chances of having a healthy pregnancy. If you are trying to conceive you should be taking folic acid to reduce the risk of neural tube defects such as spina bifida.

What should I do in my next pregnancy?

It is important that you have a scan early in any other pregnancy to make sure that it is growing in the right place. As soon as you think you might be pregnant, make an appointment to see your GP and they can organise an ultrasound scan.

If you have any questions

Please contact the Gynaecology Day Assessment Unit at Watford General Hospital on 01923-217344 during working hours.

Other sources of help

The Ectopic Pregnancy Trust Tel 01895-238025 www.ectopic.org

The Miscarriage Association Tel 01924-200799 www.miscarriageassociation.org.uk