

## **Patient Information Leaflet**

# **Medical Management of Ectopic Pregnancy using Methotrexate**



## Introduction

Sadly your pregnancy has resulted in an ectopic pregnancy; this is a pregnancy that has developed outside of the womb (uterus). We are very sorry that this has happened, and hope that the information in this leaflet will be of some help to you and your partner.

The staff in the Woodlands Clinic hope to help you through this distressing time by:

- Explaining more about ectopic pregnancy
- Explaining the treatment advised for you by the medical staff
- Being available to give you advice over the telephone. When the unit is closed, ward 7 A South, the main gynaecology ward, is available for you to contact. Contact telephone numbers are found on the back page.
- Providing written information for you, in the form of this leaflet, to help you understand what is happening to you.

This leaflet aims to help you understand more about ectopic pregnancy generally and specifically about **Medical Management of Ectopic Pregnancy** using the drug **Methotrexate**. It also aims to tell you where to seek more support to help you to come to terms with losing your baby, and about planning future pregnancies.

## Frequently asked questions

### What is Methotrexate?

It is from the family of cytotoxic drugs. In your case it works by preventing the placental cells from developing and consequently requires only a small dosage which also means that any side effects are lessened. However, in some instances depending on how your body responds to treatment you may require a second dose or, rarely, an operation.

## **Why have I been offered this treatment?**

Although the incidence of ectopic pregnancy may be increasing, undoubtedly more cases are diagnosed because of improved diagnostic facilities such as ultrasound and hormone blood tests.

## **What are the advantages of Methotrexate?**

If your ectopic pregnancy is not too far advanced or ruptured, it is an appropriate treatment option because:

- It has a good success rate (more than 90%) for treating small ectopic pregnancies.
- It avoids surgery & the associated risks of having a general anaesthetic.
- It is less likely than surgery to cause further fallopian tube damage.
- It offers the best chance of maintaining fertility after treatment.
- You do not have to stay in hospital.

## **What are the disadvantages of Methotrexate?**

- It can take a few weeks to complete the treatment
- Side effects of the drug itself, such as: nausea, vomiting, diarrhoea.
- There may be some mild, temporary abnormalities in liver function tests, which you are unlikely to be aware of. However, you may require further blood tests during your treatment
- Repeated visits to the hospital for blood tests are essential.
- You may require a second dose of the drug.
- You are advised to wait at least three months before trying for a further pregnancy.
- You are more vulnerable to infection (if you come into contact with someone with flu/common cold etc).

**NB There may be a delay to your treatment with Methotrexate if a trained member of staff is not available to administer the drug. This is especially likely over bank holidays and some weekends.**

## **How is the drug given?**

It is administered by a suitably trained doctor or nurse into the large muscle of the buttock or thigh.

Your dose is individually calculated and mixed by the pharmacy department, and this does take a few hours. Depending on your circumstances you may be admitted to the main gynaecology ward overnight, or you might be asked to return the following day to the Woodlands Clinic to have the Injection.

Provided you are feeling well, you will be allowed home shortly after the administration of the drug.

Some patients (about 15%) require a further dose of the drug, and this would be similarly administered.

## **Is there anything I must avoid for the duration of my treatment?**

- Yes. It is important you avoid the following:  
Sexual intercourse; smoking; alcohol; folic acid; exposure to the sun/sunlamps;  
non steroidal anti inflammatory analgesia (NSAIDs) such as aspirin, ibuprofen, diclofenac; herbal remedies.
- We would also advise you to take an adequate fluid intake to avoid your dehydration throughout this procedure.
- Avoid penicillin and trimethoprim

## **How many times will I have to return to the hospital for blood tests?**

This varies for every woman, but certainly we will monitor your blood tests until the pregnancy hormone ( $\beta$ hCG) is negative. This usually takes anywhere between two to six weeks. Initially you will need to attend the hospital for repeat blood tests four days and seven days after the Methotrexate was given to you.

It is essential that we monitor you closely during this procedure and will not administer any treatment unless you commit to attending follow up appointments.

## **Will I experience any pain?**

Yes you might have some lower pelvic pain or back ache at any time during the course of your treatment. If required, you can take Paracetamol.

Whilst you are at home it is important to notify either the Woodlands Clinic or 7A South if:

- You experience pain.
- Pain somewhere you have not previously had pain.
- You feel faint or dizzy.
- Paracetamol is insufficient for any pain you are experiencing.

**We understand that sometimes it can be frightening being at home during a course of treatment. Please do not hesitate to contact us if you are unsure what to do.**

## **Will I have any vaginal bleeding?**

Yes. This can vary from dark brown spotting to heavier bright red loss. Use sanitary towels rather than tampons whilst you are bleeding, to reduce the risk of any infection. If you are concerned that the bleeding is excessive (requiring you to change a sanitary pad every half an hour) please telephone either the Woodlands Clinic or **Ward 7A South** for advice.

## **Can I have a bath/shower during my treatment?**

Avoid hot baths whilst you are bleeding heavily, as you may feel faint. Otherwise it is safe for you to have a warm bath or shower.

## **Should I be off work during the treatment?**

This is a very individual thing to you.

However it is stressful having treatment, and you are recovering from the loss of your pregnancy which can be a very distressing event in a woman's life.

Many women feel that at least a few days off work may be necessary, especially during the first week when frequent trips to the hospital are required. You can self-certificate for the first week off work, alternatively the staff in the Woodlands Clinic will provide you with a sick certificate.

## **How long must I wait before trying to become pregnant again?**

At least three months.

This ensures that all of the Methotrexate has left your body with no effect on future pregnancies.

During this time it is advisable to use condoms for contraception.

## **When can I expect a period?**

Every woman is different regarding how soon after treatment for an ectopic pregnancy they have their next period, however sometime in the next four to six weeks is considered common.

Often this period may be different than usual (heavier or lighter), again this is nothing to be concerned about, unless the bleeding is very heavy; in which case consult your GP or the Woodlands Clinic directly.

## **What happens when I do become pregnant again?**

Women who have had an ectopic pregnancy are more at risk of it happening again. If you suspect you may be pregnant:

- Do an early urine pregnancy test at home
- Contact the Woodlands Clinic if you have any signs or symptoms similar to those you experienced on this occasion.

If you are otherwise well, your GP will arrange for you to have an early ultrasound scan, to ensure that the pregnancy is in the womb.

## **Emotionally**

It is not unusual to feel low in mood or tearful at any time during or after your treatment for ectopic pregnancy. Some ladies even feel quite angry, 'why has it happened to me?'

It is quite normal for you to feel sad and upset about losing a pregnancy. Losing a pregnancy can be a very painful experience for partners too, and sometimes their grief is unacknowledged.

If you feel that you, or your partner, need more help coming to terms with losing your baby, there are some contact numbers on the back page which may be of assistance to you.

## **Do I need to inform anyone about my ectopic pregnancy?**

No. Staff in the Woodlands Clinic will have written to your GP & community midwife and any antenatal scans or appointments will have been cancelled, so you do not need to worry about doing this.

## **The future**

Any preconception care you have been following should continue, once it is safe for you to try & become pregnant again such as:

- Taking folic acid
- Reducing your alcohol and caffeine intake
- Ceasing smoking

If you are unsure whether you wish to try for a future pregnancy, it is advisable to consider your contraceptive needs during this time.

**We hope this information leaflet has been of help to you. If you have any further concerns, please contact the staff in the Woodlands Clinic**

## **Contact telephone numbers:**

### **Woodlands Clinic (Early Pregnancy Unit)**

01438 286190

(Mon - Fri 8am-8pm; Sat - Sun 9am-5pm)

### **Further help and information:**

If you feel that you, or your partner, need more help coming to terms with losing your baby, here are some contact numbers, which may be of use:

#### **Bereavement Midwife**

07770 280868

#### **The Miscarriage Association:**

01924 200799 (Mon-Fri 9am-4pm)

[www.miscarriageassociation.org.uk](http://www.miscarriageassociation.org.uk)

#### **The Ectopic Pregnancy Trust:**

020 7733 2653 (24hrs)

[www.ectopic.org.uk](http://www.ectopic.org.uk)

Date of publication: September 2015

Author: ss/fc

Reference: Med Man of Ectopic/Methptrexate

Version: 2

Review Date: September 2018

© East and North Hertfordshire NHS Trust

You can request this information in a different format or another language.