Medical treatment of ectopic pregnancy

Medical treatment of an ectopic pregnancy uses medication in an attempt to avoid an operation. The medication used is a Methotrexate injection into the muscle of the buttock.

What is Methotrexate?
Methotrexate stops the body’s cells from dividing and growing. It can be used in the treatment of ectopic pregnancy to stop the pregnancy growing.

Who is suitable for this treatment?
In order for this treatment to be considered:

- you need to be in good health.
- the diagnosis needs to have been confirmed.
- the ectopic pregnancy should be relatively small and your tube intact.
- you must be willing to follow strict instructions and precautions including several hospital visits and blood tests in the first 4 weeks of the treatment.
- you will be expected to have another adult with you at all times in the early stages of your treatment.

Who is unsuitable for this treatment?
Some people are not suitable for this treatment, such as those:

- with certain medical conditions.
- on certain medicines.
- who have significant internal bleeding from the pregnancy.

What are the benefits of this treatment?
This treatment has a 95% success rate.

By having this treatment:

- surgery and its associated risks are avoided.
- you will be in hospital for less time and will have a quicker recovery if surgery is avoided.
- loss or damage to the fallopian tube is reduced.
- you will have a better chance of retaining your future fertility.
What are the disadvantages of this treatment?
There are some disadvantages to this treatment, such as:

- Several visits to the hospital for blood tests to monitor your pregnancy hormones.
- It may take up to 4 weeks for your pregnancy hormone level test results to return to negative.
- There is about a 5% chance that it will not work and surgery may still be needed.
- You may experience side-effects from the medication.

What are the side-effects?
These are uncommon for the small single dose you will usually receive (sometimes a second dose is necessary).

Side-effects include:

- Sore mouth.
- Sensitivity to sunlight.
- Difficulty with swallowing, sickness and diarrhoea from irritation of the bowel.
- Rarely, this drug can affect the body’s ability to make blood cells leading to anaemia.
- Rarely, temporary hair loss may be experienced.

What precautions are necessary?

- Avoid sunbathing, intercourse and alcohol in the week following your injection.
- **It is very important to avoid pregnancy by using effective contraception for at least 6 months after your treatment.**

Pain
You may have some pain in the abdomen in the first 7 days after the injection. The pain may get worse but if you are concerned, telephone the gynaecological ward for advice and be prepared to attend for a check up.

Bleeding
You are likely to experience some vaginal bleeding with possible clots. A small amount is normal, however if you are concerned, please telephone one of the numbers below for advice.

Stages of your treatment and follow up

Day 1 ___________ Blood test and injection of Methotrexate

Day 4 ___________ Blood test

Day 7 ___________ Blood test

Blood tests will be performed weekly until your pregnancy hormone level is negative.
What if it fails?
If your symptoms suggest at any time that the ectopic pregnancy is bleeding internally an operation will be necessary.

If the pregnancy hormone levels are not dropping quickly enough by day 7, a repeat injection may be needed.

If, after the appropriate length of time the hormone levels are not dropping satisfactorily, an operation may still be necessary.

What are the alternatives to this treatment?
If deemed appropriate by your doctor, an alternative would be a surgical procedure called a laparoscopy. This is keyhole surgery which may result in the removal of a damaged tube. In some cases a larger incision may be made in the tummy.

Due to the nature of an ectopic pregnancy and the risks associated, the consequences of not receiving any treatment can be life threatening.

Decisions
Your doctors will decide if you are suitable for this treatment.

You must decide if you consider that the benefits for you outweigh the disadvantages and that you can follow the necessary strict instructions and precautions.

If you wish to have medical treatment, please sign the attached sheet confirming that you have read this information leaflet.

Useful contacts
The Ectopic Pregnancy Trust
2nd floor, Golden Jubilee Wing
Kings College Hospital
Denmark Hill
London
SE5 9RS
Telephone: 0207 7332 653
Website: www.ectopic.org.uk

The Miscarriage Association
Clayton Hospital
Northgate Wakefield
West Yorkshire
WF1 3JS
Telephone: 01924 200 799
(Monday to Friday, 9.00am - 4.00pm)
Website: www.miscarriageassociation.org.uk

If you have any queries, or require further information please contact the Gynaecology Assessment Unit between 9.00am - 4.30pm on 01332 785637.
Alternatively contact Ward 209 on 01332 787209.

NHS Direct is a 24 hour nurse led, confidential service providing general healthcare advice and information.
Telephone 0845 4647 or visit the website at www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk

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