

# Expectant Management of an Ectopic Pregnancy

## What is an 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 expectant management ('wait and see').

Therefore drug therapy or a general anaesthetic and surgery can be avoided. However, a 'wait and see' approach is not often advised. This is because there is a chance of a sudden rupture of the fallopian tube. This will need emergency surgery.

## Expectant management ('wait and see')

A possible option is to 'see how things go' if you have mild or no symptoms. This involves waiting for an ectopic pregnancy (a pregnancy growing outside the womb) or pregnancy of unknown location (a positive pregnancy test but no pregnancy seen on an ultrasound scan) to resolve naturally without any medical or surgical intervention. A pregnancy is only visible on scan when the pregnancy hormone ( $\beta$ -hCG) reaches a certain level.

Expectant management is only suitable for a small number of women when the  $\beta$ -hCG level is low, there is little abdominal pain and there is no ectopic pregnancy seen on the scan. It involves blood tests to monitor the  $\beta$ -hCG until it reaches < 2IU/mL. If it fails to fall or is rising a further scan is indicated to decide on further management. It can take several days to establish whether or not further treatment is indicated. You can have treatment if the symptoms become worse.

You must be prepared to have follow up and stay in close contact with the Acute Assessment. You will require close observation, repeated ultrasound scans and blood tests to check on how things are developing.

A small number of women may have a persistent ectopic pregnancy. There is a risk that an ectopic pregnancy could rupture and cause internal bleeding; therefore you **must** seek medical care if you experience any of the following symptoms:

- An increased amount of abdominal pain
- You are feeling generally unwell
- Have dizziness or faintness
- Nausea and vomiting or
- Shoulder-tip pain

## Contact us

*If you have sudden severe pain please call an ambulance - 111*

**Department:** Women's Acute Assessment

**Phone:** (04) 806 0740

**Hours:** 8am-4.30pm, Monday to Friday

*Or*

**Department:** Ward 4 North Gynaecology

**Phone:** (04) 806 0880

**Hours:** anytime

### Miscarriage Support Group

Support and information for women and their families who have lost a baby through miscarriage or ectopic pregnancy

[www.miscarriagesupport.or.nz](http://www.miscarriagesupport.or.nz)

### Sands

For support and information for women and families who have lost a baby through miscarriage or ectopic pregnancy

**Phone:** 022 398 3917

[sandswellingtonandhutt.org.nz](http://sandswellingtonandhutt.org.nz)