



Early Pregnancy Assessment Clinic (EPAC)

When an Ectopic Pregnancy (pregnancy of unknown location) Has not been Ruled Out

You might have had a scan, or bloods taken and been informed that there could be a possibility of an ectopic pregnancy. We sometimes refer to this situation as “pregnancy of unknown location”. Usually, further investigations are required, and it may take a few days or weeks to know definitely. The doctor or nurse will explain this to you and answer any questions.

Whilst we are carrying out the investigations, it is very important that you look out for any changes in your symptoms. It is advisable to ensure there is always someone close by to help or take you to hospital if you start to feel unwell.

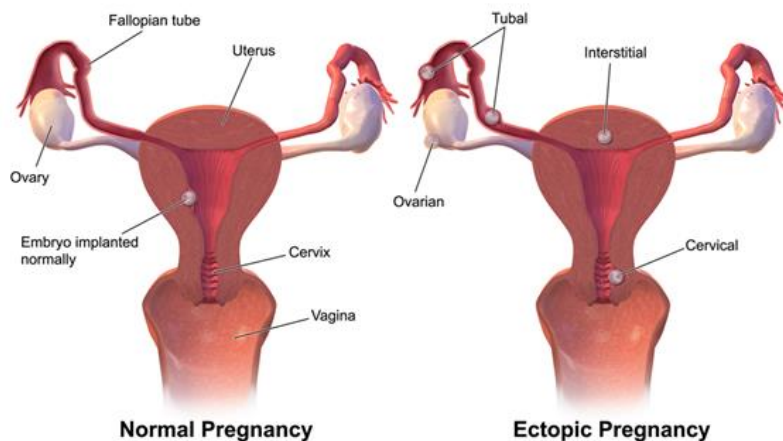
Pain may occur suddenly with or without vaginal bleeding.

It is not usually possible to diagnose an ectopic pregnancy from the symptoms alone, as pain and bleeding can also be quite normal in pregnancy. However, some women will have no symptoms at all in the early stages of an ectopic pregnancy.

If the diagnosis is certain, an appropriate course of action will be discussed with you.

What is an ectopic pregnancy?

An ectopic pregnancy occurs when the fertilised egg implants outside the uterus (womb), affecting 1 in 80 pregnancies. Most ectopic pregnancies develop in the fallopian tube, which connects the ovary to the uterus. Rarely, it may implant elsewhere, for example on the ovary, cervix, caesarean section scar or in the pelvic cavity.



The above diagram has been used with permission from Blausen Medical Communications, Inc.

As the fallopian tube is not large enough to accommodate a growing embryo, the thin wall of the tube will stretch, causing pain in the pelvic region and often vaginal bleeding.

If not diagnosed and treated quickly enough, the tube can sometimes rupture. This can lead to maternal 'collapse' (please see description below) and rarely, death.

What are the symptoms?

Any sexually active woman of childbearing age who has pelvic pain might be suspected of having an ectopic pregnancy until proven otherwise.

All the symptoms below can also be present with a pregnancy that is normal:

Pelvic pain

- This can be persistent and severe. The pain may be on one side, but not necessarily on the side of the ectopic pregnancy.

Abnormal vaginal bleeding

- You may not have initially known you were pregnant and may have experienced an abnormal period.
- You may have a coil fitted. We will check by scan whether it is still correctly placed in the womb.
- Unlike a period, the bleeding may be dark or watery, sometimes described as looking like "prune juice".

Bowel or bladder problems

- You might experience pain when opening your bowels.
- Constipation or diarrhoea may be a symptom, along with pain when passing urine.

Shoulder tip pain

- This may occur due to internal bleeding irritating the diaphragm.

Collapse

- You may feel faint or light-headed. Some women have a feeling that something is wrong.
- Other signs can be paleness, increasing pulse rate, falling blood pressure and sometimes sickness and diarrhoea.

If you experience any of the signs and symptoms outlined above, it is important to seek medical advice straight away.

Our contact number is below. It may be that you will need to attend the hospital to be assessed by the on-call gynaecology team.

Contact Details:

Dorset County Hospital Early Pregnancy Clinic (24-hour contact):

Tel: 01305 255760

Further Information and Support:

The Ectopic Pregnancy Trust website:

<http://www.ectopic.org.uk/>

The Ectopic Pregnancy Trust helpline:

Tel: 020 7733 2653

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