

Ectopic Pregnancies

An **ectopic pregnancy** is when an **embryo** starts to develop outside the **uterus**.

(Ectopic means out of place.) This happens less than 2 percent of the time.

In normal pregnancies, an egg travels from a woman's **ovary** to the uterus. It travels down the **fallopian tube** to get there.

Somewhere along the way, the egg gets **fertilized** by a male **sperm**. Once inside, the egg attaches to the wall of the uterus. It becomes an embryo and then a fetus. Nine months later, a baby is born.

In ectopic pregnancies, the fertilized egg does not reach the uterus. It starts to grow somewhere else. Most often, that's in the fallopian tube.

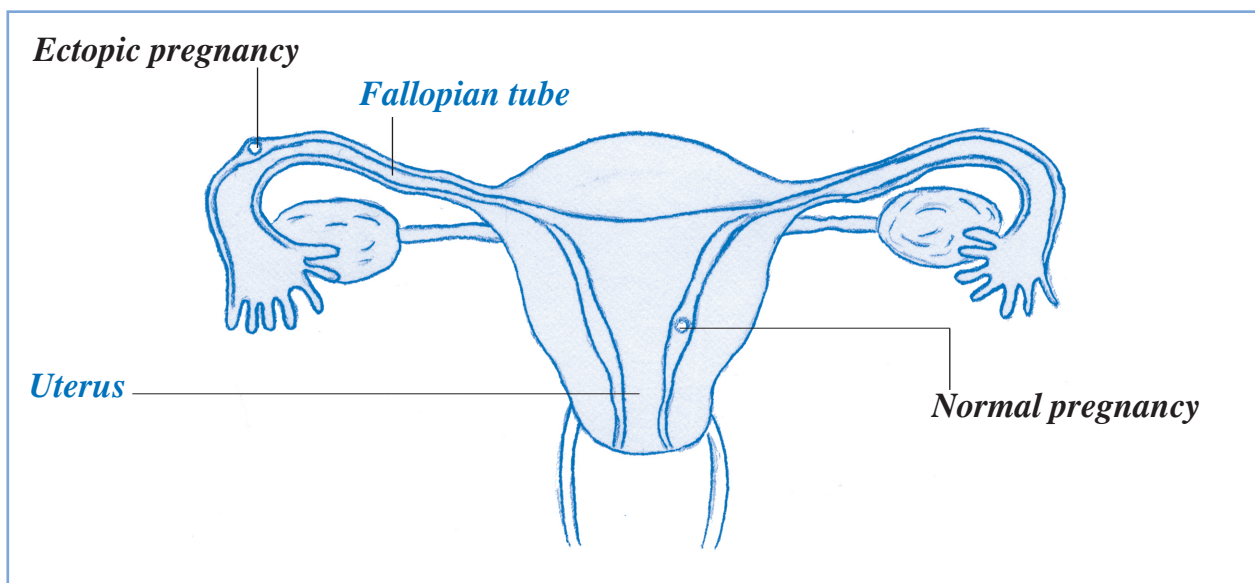
The embryo can't survive for long outside the uterus. But it can put the mother in danger if it gets too big. It can rupture an organ or cause internal bleeding. Medical steps must be taken right away.

Symptoms

Some women may have no symptoms. They may not even know that they are pregnant. When there are symptoms, they usually come within 8 weeks of **conception**.

Symptoms may include:

- Pain in the lower belly
- Pain on one side of the body
- Vaginal spotting and bleeding
- Pain in the **rectum** (rear end) or shoulder



Ectopic Pregnancies, Continued

- Feeling like throwing up
- Throwing up
- Feeling weak
- Fainting

Diagnosis

Ultrasound can sometimes locate the embryo. **Laparoscopy** is another option. That's when a tiny camera with a light is put in the mother's body. It goes in through a very small incision (cut).

Causes

There are many causes for ectopic pregnancies:

- Damage to the **ovary** or **fallopian tube**
- Scarring of the ovary or fallopian tube. Scarring can result from **endometriosis**, **pelvic inflammatory disease** or an **STD**. (Read "Sexually Transmitted Diseases [STDs]" at www.HealthyLearn.com.)

Also, the risk for an **ectopic pregnancy** is higher for women who:

- Have had an ectopic pregnancy in the past
- Have had **fallopian tube** surgery
- Have had problems getting pregnant
- Have used an **IUD** for birth control

These women should call their health care provider when they miss a menstrual period.

Treatment

Medicines may be used. But if some time has passed, surgery may be needed. The **embryo** is removed. Any damage to the mother's body is repaired. In some rare cases, a fallopian tube or ovary must be removed. But women have another set of these. So the mother may become pregnant again.

Questions to Ask

Have you missed one or more periods? Or is there vaginal spotting or bleeding you can't explain? If one of these is true, do you have any of these symptoms?

- Fainting
- Dull or sharp pain in your belly that gets worse
- Sharp pains in your lower belly, **rectum** (rear end), or shoulder
- Cold skin and you feel faint, weak, or dizzy
- Your belly feels tender and is swollen.

YES

NO



More questions on next page

Ectopic Pregnancies, Continued

Questions continued

Do you have signs of being pregnant?

- Your breasts feel tender.
- You are sexually active and have missed a period.
- You have an upset stomach or are throwing up.
- You feel dizzy.
- A home pregnancy test says you are pregnant.

YES



NO

Have you missed a period and do you use an IUD for birth control?

YES



NO

Are you trying to get pregnant, and have you had any of these problems? Do you have any now?

- **Pelvic inflammatory disease** or an **STD**
- Scarring of an ovary or fallopian tube

YES



NO



Self-Care Tips

Tips to Lower the Risk of an Ectopic Pregnancy

- Talk to your health care provider about your risks for damage to your **fallopian tubes** from:

- **STDs**
- **Pelvic Inflammatory Disease**
- **Endometriosis**

- Ask if you need to get tested for these and how often. Find out, too, if your health plan pays for these tests.
- Schedule any tests needed with your health care provider.

