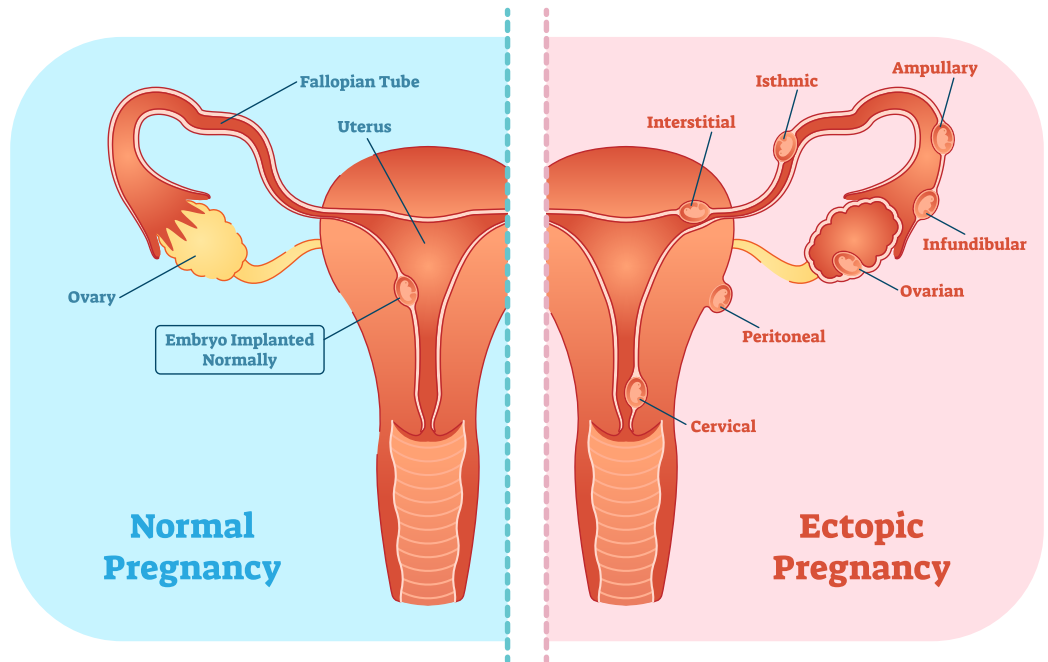




# Ectopic pregnancies

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

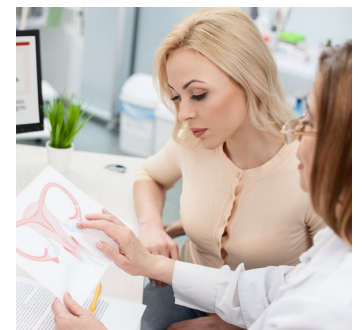
Some women may have no symptoms. They may not even know that they are pregnant. When there are symptoms, they usually come within 8 weeks of conception.

### 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
- 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 STI.

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
- Have smoked cigarettes just before getting pregnant

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.



## TRIAGE QUESTIONS

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.

**NO**  
↓

**YES ➡ GET EMERGENCY MEDICAL CARE**



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.

**NO**  
↓

**YES ➡ CALL DOCTOR**



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

**NO**  
↓

**YES ➡ CALL DOCTOR**



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

- Pelvic inflammatory disease or an STI
- Scarring of an ovary or fallopian tube

**NO**  
↓

**YES ➡ CALL DOCTOR**



**USE SELF-CARE**



## SELF-CARE

### 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:
  - STIs
  - 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.
- Don't smoke. If you do, quit before you try to get pregnant.