



Methotrexate Use in Early Pregnancy - Patient Information

What is Methotrexate?

Methotrexate (MTX) is used in the management of a wide variety of problems such as malignancy as well as in the management of early pregnancy problems, such as an ectopic pregnancy. The safety of methotrexate in women still wishing to have children has been extensively proven in studies since the 1970s. Although technically MTX is unlicensed (see below) for use in pregnancy, there have been no reported cases of an increased incidence of miscarriage or congenital anomalies following its use in subsequent pregnancies when medical advice is followed of not conceiving during the recommend timeframe, and women may be reassured of this.

When is it used in early pregnancy?

It is used as first line management for suitable confirmed or suspected ectopic pregnancies. It can also be used as an additional treatment e.g. following surgical treatment.

How will I be followed up?

Women are followed up for much longer when this treatment is used because it can take a number of weeks for the pregnancy hormone to fall down to non-pregnant levels, and the treatment, although successful in the vast majority, it is not successful in all women. You will need to have regular blood tests as may need vaginal ultrasound scans to confirm the treatment has worked. If it does not achieve the desired effect you may need surgery to resolve the ectopic pregnancy.

What are the side effects?

These are uncommon, but abdominal pain nearly always occurs. If you are unable to cope with the pain then you must seek medical advice because the pain may sometimes be due to complications of the ectopic pregnancy, which requires medical assessment. Sore mouth, tummy upset and bladder irritation may also occur. You must avoid antibiotics, alcohol, folic acid, steroids, NSAIDs (eg. Aspirin, Ibuprofen), Vitamin C, unprotected sex and direct sunlight.

What are the other important things I need to know?

- This is a proven treatment
- You need to be compliant with the tests and hospital visits
- You should have adult company 24hrs/day for the first 3 to 5 days
- Average time for a complete response to treatment is 4 weeks
- Side Effects are minimal and mainly gastrointestinal e.g. nausea, vomiting, abdominal discomfort, and dark urine but can include sore throat, mouth ulcers, bleeding gums, coughs and shortness of breath. Please report any of these symptoms to the ward by calling the telephone number you have been given.
- Transient abdominal and/or pelvic pain for the first 2 to 3 days and up to 7 days is very

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common after the first injection. Please report to the ward if the pain is increasing or progressively getting worse by calling the telephone number you have been given.

- If any concerns, ring the ward at the hospital that gave you the Methotrexate injection for advice
- You can come to the hospital anytime you feel unwell without needing to contact your GP first. Please go to ED if you are experiencing severe pain otherwise please call GAU and let them know you are going in to be seen
- Methotrexate should not be used if you are breastfeeding

When can I try for a baby again?

Contraception is advised for three months following a single dose MTX or six months following at least 2 doses of MTX. Sexual intercourse can be resumed after the first normal period, but do remember to use contraception. When you are next pregnant you should have an early scan to confirm that the pregnancy is in the correct place. This can be organised by your GP through the EGU.

Is it licensed Medication for use in early pregnancy?

No, this is unlicensed use. In the UK most medicines are licensed but some are not. You are to receive a medicine prescribed for you that is not licensed, or is being used for a reason not covered by the license. We want to reassure you that we have thought very carefully about the best medicine for you and to answer any questions you may have.

Why are medicines licensed?

The makers of medicines must ask the government for a Product License if they want to sell their medicine in the UK. They show the governments Medicines Control Agency that their medicine works for the illnesses to be treated, does not have too many side effects or risks and has been made to a high standard. To be sure that a medicine works and is safe the maker has to try it first on a small number of people in what is called a clinical trial. Information from clinical trials is given to the Medicines Control Agency when the maker asks for a Product Licence.

Why don't all medicines have a license, how do I know that these medicines are safe and will work?

There are several reasons why some medicines are used for illnesses or conditions not covered by their license, and why some medicines have no license at all. Sometimes the clinical trial (and Product License) is for one illness but doctors find that the medicine works very well for another illness. Sometimes it may not be worthwhile for makers to test and produce specific medicines for other illnesses not initially thought of. Another doctor who is an expert will have recommended this medicine, or your own doctor will have read information that says it is the best one for you.

Should I be worried about taking these medicines?

Doctors have a lot of experience with the medicines used whether the medicines are licensed or not. If you are still worried after reading this leaflet, please talk to the doctor or. They are looking after you and have carefully thought about the best medicine for you.

What if I don't want to take unlicensed medicines?

Talk it over with your doctor and tell them what you are worried about. We want to reassure you that we have thought very carefully about the best medicine for you and would be happy to answer any questions you may have. Before declining any medication, please discuss with a doctor and question the alternatives, or any risks and benefits.

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If you require this information in another format, such as a different language, large print, braille or audio version please ask a member of staff or email interpreting.service@uhb.nhs.uk