

Ectopic Pregnancy: Causes, Symptoms, Diagnosis, and Treatment

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DESCRIPTION

An ectopic pregnancy occurs when a fertilized egg implants outside the uterus, most commonly in one of the fallopian tubes. This is a serious condition that can pose significant health risks to the mother if not diagnosed and treated promptly. In this article, we will explain what ectopic pregnancy is, its causes, symptoms, diagnostic methods, and the available treatment options.

An ectopic pregnancy, also known as a tubal pregnancy when it occurs in the fallopian tube, happens when a fertilized egg fails to travel down the fallopian tube to implant in the uterus. Instead, the fertilized egg implants in a location that is not suitable for the developing embryo, such as the fallopian tube, ovary, cervix, or abdomen. These pregnancies are not viable and can lead to life-threatening complications for the mother if not treated. Ectopic pregnancies are rare but serious. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), about 1 in 50 pregnancies are ectopic. The vast majority of ectopic pregnancies occur in the fallopian tubes, but other sites of implantation are also possible.

There are several factors that can contribute to the occurrence of an ectopic pregnancy. Damage or scarring of the fallopian tubes is one of the leading causes of ectopic pregnancies. Conditions such as Pelvic Inflammatory Disease (PID), often caused by Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs) like chlamydia or gonorrhea, can cause scarring in the tubes, making it difficult for the fertilized egg to move to the uterus. Women who have had one ectopic pregnancy are at a higher risk of having another. The risk increases if the fallopian tubes were damaged or had surgery in the past. Some assisted reproductive technologies, such as *In Vitro* Fertilization (IVF), may increase the risk of an ectopic pregnancy, especially if embryos implant outside the uterus. Women who use certain types of contraception, particularly Intrauterine Devices (IUDs), have a slightly higher risk of ectopic pregnancy. However, the risk is still lower than in women who are not using contraception at all.

Ectopic pregnancies can cause a variety of symptoms, but many of these symptoms are similar to those of a normal pregnancy.

Early symptoms may not be immediately recognized as a sign of an ectopic pregnancy, which is why it is important for women to be vigilant about their health and seek medical attention. This is often the most noticeable symptom. The pain may begin on one side of the lower abdomen and may range from mild to severe. In some cases, the pain may become sharp or stabbing. Light bleeding or spotting is common in early pregnancy. However, vaginal bleeding in combination with abdominal pain should raise concern and prompt a visit to the doctor. This can occur if the ectopic pregnancy causes internal bleeding and the blood irritates the diaphragm. Shoulder pain, particularly when lying down, is a warning sign of a ruptured ectopic pregnancy. In some cases, an ectopic pregnancy can cause discomfort during urination or bowel movements, particularly if it is implanted in the cervix or near the bladder.

Diagnosing an ectopic pregnancy early is essential for the health and safety of the mother. Healthcare providers typically use the following methods to confirm the presence of an ectopic pregnancy. Human Chorionic Gonadotropin (hCG) levels are measured in the blood. In a normal pregnancy, hCG levels rise steadily. In the case of an ectopic pregnancy, hCG levels may rise more slowly or plateau, indicating a problem. A transvaginal ultrasound is often used to locate the pregnancy. In a normal pregnancy, an ultrasound will show a developing fetus inside the uterus. If no fetus is visible and hCG levels are abnormal, the doctor may suspect an ectopic pregnancy. In some cases, if the diagnosis is unclear, the doctor may perform a laparoscopy (a minimally invasive surgery) to directly view the fallopian tubes and other pelvic structures.

CONCLUSION

Ectopic pregnancy is a serious condition that requires prompt diagnosis and treatment to protect the health and fertility of the woman. It is essential for women to be aware of the symptoms and seek medical attention if they suspect an ectopic pregnancy. While early diagnosis and treatment are key to minimizing the risks, understanding the causes and being proactive about reproductive health can also help reduce the likelihood of an ectopic pregnancy occurring.

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