

# caring safe confidential professional

## Ectopic Pregnancy

When you came to **bpas** the doctor or nurse spoke to you about the very small risk of ectopic pregnancy. This leaflet is to give you some more details. Keep it to refer to later if you need to.

### What is Ectopic Pregnancy?

This is when the pregnancy grows outside of the uterus (womb) where it would normally develop. Often, an ectopic pregnancy grows in one of the fallopian tubes.

### Why was I told about ectopic pregnancy at my visit?

Although you have had a positive pregnancy test, your pregnancy may be so early that we cannot see it on the ultrasound scan. This is most common when the gestational age is less than 5 weeks by your last menstrual period. If we cannot see the pregnancy on ultrasound, it means we cannot be sure the pregnancy is developing inside the uterus.

### What might that mean?

There are 3 possibilities

- A normal pregnancy is growing in the uterus
- A pregnancy in the uterus has started but is no longer growing (a natural miscarriage)
- An ectopic pregnancy

The doctor or nurse at **bpas** will have talked with you about the likelihood of these possibilities based on your medical history.

### How common is it?

Around 1% of all pregnancies are ectopic. Although it is not common, when it does occur

it is very serious, and can be life threatening.

### Are some women at higher risk of ectopic pregnancy?

An ectopic pregnancy can happen to any woman, but there are circumstances which make it more likely. These include:

- Previous ectopic pregnancy
- Diseases that affect the fallopian tubes
- Previous abdominal surgery
- A history of pelvic inflammatory disease (PID)
- An intrauterine contraceptive device in place such as the copper "coil" and Mirena
- Smoking

### What are the signs or symptoms of ectopic pregnancy?

- Lower abdominal pain, especially if on one side and severe
- Pain under the ribs or in the shoulders
- Fainting or feeling light headed
- Vaginal bleeding

### What are my options?

Your options depend on your risk of ectopic pregnancy:

- If the doctor or nurse feels that you are at low risk and you have no concerning signs or symptoms, you can return for a repeat scan in

a week. The doctor or nurse should be able to see then whether the pregnancy is developing inside the uterus.

- If you are considered to be higher risk we will refer you to a local Early Pregnancy Assessment Unit (EPAU) for immediate evaluation. They will be able to perform laboratory or other tests to determine if the pregnancy is normal, abnormal, or ectopic.
- Even if you are at low risk of ectopic pregnancy you can be referred to an EPAU. If you would prefer this option please tell the doctor or nurse.

If you decide to return to **bpas** for a repeat scan in a week, and experience any of the symptoms of ectopic pregnancy please seek medical advice immediately from:

- **bpas** Post Treatment Support Line  
**0800 247 1122**
- Your GP or
- The nearest A&E department

For more information, visit our website:  
**www.bpas.org**

