

Overview

Ectopic pregnancy

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An ectopic pregnancy is a pregnancy that grows outside of the womb.

It cannot develop into a baby and it could put your health at risk if the pregnancy continues.

Ectopic pregnancies affect 1 in every 80 pregnancies in Ireland.

An ectopic pregnancy usually happens in the fallopian tube. This is the tube that normally carries the egg from the ovary to the womb.

This guide is mainly about ectopic pregnancies that happen in the fallopian tube. These are the most common type of ectopic pregnancy in Ireland.

Why an ectopic pregnancy happens

Before you become pregnant, the ovary releases an egg. This egg travels down your fallopian tube towards the womb. It meets the sperm in the fallopian tube. This is where fertilisation happens.

The fertilised egg then moves down the fallopian tube to the womb.

In a regular pregnancy the egg will implant in the womb, where the baby will grow.

In an ectopic pregnancy the fertilised egg implants outside the womb. In most ectopic pregnancies the egg implants in the fallopian tube.

In other cases the egg can implant in other locations outside the womb such as:

- your cervix (the neck of your womb)
- your ovary (rare)
- inside your abdomen (very rare)

How an ectopic pregnancy develops

When the ectopic pregnancy implants in your fallopian tube it will grow. You might notice pain early on in the pregnancy. Sometimes there will be bleeding from your vagina.

This is dangerous. Your fallopian tubes are narrow. As the pregnancy develops the tube can stretch. In some cases, the tube can burst. This can cause severe pain in your tummy and internal bleeding.

A pregnancy cannot survive in the fallopian tube.

[Symptoms of ectopic pregnancy](#)

Ectopic pregnancy causes

Most of the time it's impossible to say why an ectopic pregnancy happened.

In some instances, your chances of an ectopic pregnancy are higher.

The following factors can increase your chance of having an ectopic pregnancy:

- previous ectopic pregnancy
- previous surgery on the fallopian tubes
- damage to the tubes by infections like Pelvic Inflammatory Disease (PID)
- [smoking](#)
- fertility treatments like in vitro fertilisation (IVF) or intracytoplasmic sperm injection (ICSI)
- becoming pregnant while using certain [contraceptives](#) such as the coil
- age - if you are over 40 years old when you become pregnant

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