

PATIENT HANDOUT

Ectopic pregnancy is a type of pregnancy loss that has unique challenges, and we hope the information in this handout will support you in your journey and help you emotionally as you work through your experience.

What is an ectopic pregnancy?

An ectopic pregnancy is defined as any pregnancy that develops outside the uterus. Ectopic pregnancies are not able to develop safely and occur in approximately 1-2% of all pregnancies. The management of ectopic pregnancy can be surgical or medical (with medication or watchful waiting). If an ectopic pregnancy ruptures, this is a life-threatening emergency that may require surgery.



The medical care you receive for your ectopic pregnancy needs to be tailored to your individual case and should be discussed with your health care team. If you would like a supportive resource on the medical aspects of ectopic pregnancy, we suggest the [PregnancyED handout](#) on ectopic pregnancy (accessible through the QR code or [PregnancyED website](#)). We also have a list of questions below that we recommend discussing with your health care team.

What makes an ectopic pregnancy unique?

An ectopic pregnancy is a complex experience that can bring unique physical and emotional challenges. It often happens suddenly, and in some cases, people may learn they are pregnant at the same time they are told the pregnancy is ectopic, leaving little time to process the loss before facing serious risk to their own health.

Ectopic pregnancy can be painful and traumatic. It may require urgent surgery and could lead to the loss of a fallopian tube or ovary. Whether an ectopic pregnancy is managed with medication or surgery, this can be accompanied by uncertainty, anxiety, or other emotions. You may be navigating the grief of changes to your body and/or be concerned about risks to your fertility.



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What makes an ectopic pregnancy unique? *continued*

It is completely normal to feel a range of emotions, often at the same time, which can be confusing. Some people who experience ectopic pregnancy may feel shock, fear, numbness, or deep sadness, alongside a sense of relief that they have survived a medical emergency. You may also feel that you did something to cause it, but remember that this is not your fault.

Grief after an ectopic pregnancy can feel isolating, especially because it isn't very common and is rarely discussed openly or recognized by society, even though it is a valid pregnancy loss. Since it often happens early and there are rarely physical remains, the loss can feel invisible.

This experience may also affect your relationships. Your partner (and/or loved ones) may grieve differently or on a different timeline, especially after the trauma of watching you go through a medical emergency. Remember that people cope in their own way, and differences in how people grieve do not mean a difference in how much they care.

Your grief is valid. You can choose to grieve this loss in whatever way feels right to you and your family. Many families find their own ways to remember and honour their pregnancy loss.

How can you care for yourself after an ectopic pregnancy?

It can take time to physically and emotionally recover after an ectopic pregnancy. Be kind to yourself throughout this process. Below are some ideas to care for yourself and your family after experiencing an ectopic pregnancy:

- Reach out to friends and family you can trust. Let them know what you need, how they can help you, or how they can give you space.
- Seek out or reconnect with a counsellor or therapist
- Seek out a support group or peer support (see resources on next page)
- Speak to a spiritual/faith leader or cultural leader
- If it feels right, create a memento to commemorate or honour this pregnancy/baby/loss
- You don't have to reach out for support right away. It can be whenever you feel ready. There is no right time to seek support, and it looks different for everyone.

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Advocate for yourself at the hospital or at a follow-up visit

- Ask for a note to take time off from work if you need one
- Discuss how your pain will be managed
- Ask for a referral to a social worker if you would like one
- If it is important to you (for burial or other ceremony), you could ask if there are any pregnancy/baby remains
- You can request that your spiritual or cultural leader visit or hold a ceremony at the hospital. The hospital may also have spiritual leaders available if you'd like to speak to one.
- **It's never too late to ask questions to help you understand. No question is a bad question.**
 - Ask about your future fertility and family planning
 - Ask when you can safely have sex again or resume other activities
 - Ask about the risks of an ectopic pregnancy happening again
 - Ask about what to expect physically and emotionally
 - Ask about follow-up care

NOTES:



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Some resources that may be helpful:

THE ECTOPIC PREGNANCY TRUST

<https://ectopic.org.uk>

A charity in the United Kingdom that focuses on raising awareness and providing information about ectopic pregnancy and advocating for those who have lived through this loss.

PREGNANCY ED

<http://www.pregnancyed.com>

This Canadian website, created by physicians and families who have experienced loss, intends to answer questions about early pregnancy loss and offer resources for patients and families. There is a specific ectopic pregnancy resource available.

PREGNANCY & INFANT LOSS SUPPORT CENTRE

<http://www.pilsc.org>

Canadian organization offering free professional support, peer support, support groups, and resources for those experiencing pregnancy and infant loss.

PREGNANCY AND INFANT LOSS (PAIL) NETWORK

<https://pailnetwork.sunnybrook.ca>

An Ontario-based organization that offers compassionate, no-cost support and resources for individuals and families experiencing pregnancy and infant loss, including peer support connections and in-person and virtual support groups.

We know it hurts. We are here to help.

Scan this QR code to launch PAIL Network's online Support Referral form.

