

Pregnancy Outside of the Uterus (Ectopic)

There are times when a fertilized egg attaches to an area of the body outside of the uterus where it cannot grow safely. When this happens, it is called an ectopic pregnancy. It is most common for an ectopic pregnancy to occur in the fallopian tubes, but the egg can also implant (attach) in the ovary, abdomen, or cervix.

None of these areas can successfully grow a pregnancy. As the fetus continues to develop, it eventually grows enough that it bursts the organ where it is attached. If this happens, it can cause severe bleeding and endanger the life of the pregnant person.

To diagnose an ectopic pregnancy, a provider would use an ultrasound to see where the fetus is developing. An ultrasound is an imaging procedure that uses high-frequency sound waves to create real-time images of internal body structures, like organs.

If identified early enough, a provider can treat an ectopic pregnancy with an injection or medication that stops the growth of the embryo. Once the growth stops, the tissue is usually reabsorbed into the body. Surgery is required to remove the ectopic pregnancy if it is found at a later time. Most people who have an ectopic pregnancy can give birth in the future if they would like. Having had an ectopic pregnancy does increase the chance of having another one in the future.

Sources

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