

Abortion Care & Services Guide



What's an Abortion?

An abortion is the ending of a pregnancy. This is done by removing the embryo or fetus from the uterus.

Abortions can be done by either a surgical procedure or by taking a special medication that ends the pregnancy

An abortion is usually done in the first 12 weeks of pregnancy. After 12 weeks, it becomes a more complicated procedure. Abortions can be done as late as 20 weeks.

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THE ABORTION PILL

WHAT IS THE ABORTION PILL?

Medication abortion — also called the abortion pill — is a safe and effective way to end an early pregnancy.

HOW THE ABORTION PILL WORKS

“Abortion pill” is the popular name for using two different medicines to end a pregnancy: mifepristone and misoprostol. Your doctor will give you the first pill, mifepristone, at the health center. Pregnancy needs a hormone called progesterone to grow normally.

Mifepristone blocks your body’s own progesterone. You’ll also get some antibiotics. You take the second medicine, misoprostol, 24-48 hours later, usually at home.



This medicine causes cramping and bleeding to empty the uterus. It's kind of like having a really heavy, crampy period, and the process is very similar to an early miscarriage.

Misoprostol. Within a few days after taking mifepristone, a second drug, misoprostol, is taken. Misoprostol tablets (which may be placed either into the vagina, between cheek and gum, or swallowed) cause the uterus to contract and empty. This ends the pregnancy.



In South Africa, misoprostol alone is currently the standard of care for medical termination of pregnancy in the second trimester within the public health sector.

SURGICAL ABORTION



About Surgical Abortions

At a clinic, you will be given medication to make you relaxed and drowsy. In a hospital, you will be given a general anesthetic to make you unconscious.

During a surgical abortion, the doctor puts a speculum into the vagina to see the cervix (the opening into the uterus). The cervix is opened slightly and a small suction tube is placed inside. The inside of the uterus is then gently suctioned until the fetal tissue is gone. The entire procedure takes about 15 minutes.

Afterwards, you usually have some bleeding which can last up to 2 weeks. You will have to stay in the clinic or hospital for about 2 hours until staff are sure there are no complications.

When you've had a surgical abortion you should get antibiotics to prevent infection and pain medication to help you deal with any discomfort afterwards. The facility you go to must also have a recovery room where you can be monitored before going home.

A Vacuum aspiration is most commonly used up to 14 weeks of pregnancy, while the dilation and evacuation method is often better for pregnancies that are further along. Your doctor will talk to you about which option is best based on your health assessment.

You may be given misoprostol during a surgical abortion. This is called priming and helps to widen the cervix and makes the procedure more comfortable.

A patient information leaflet that helps her identify any danger signs, and a preferred contraceptive method because fertility can return as soon as 8 days after the procedure.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS



Mifepristone is approved in only one sub-Saharan African country—South Africa, where it was approved in 2001.

WHY DO PEOPLE CHOOSE THE ABORTION PILL?

Which kind of abortion you choose all depends on your personal preference and situation. With medication abortion, some people like that you don't need to have a procedure in a doctor's office. You can have your medication abortion at home or in another comfortable place that you choose.

You get to decide who you want to be with during your abortion, or you can go it alone. Because medication abortion is similar to a miscarriage, many people feel like it's more "natural" and less invasive.



HOW EFFECTIVE IS THE ABORTION PILL?

The abortion pill is very effective. For people who are 8 weeks pregnant or less, it works about 98 out of 100 times. From 8-9 weeks pregnant, it works about 96 out of 100 times. From 9-10 weeks, it works 93 out of 100 times. The abortion pill usually works, but if it doesn't, you can take more medicine or have an in-clinic abortion to complete the abortion.

WHEN CAN I TAKE THE ABORTION PILL?

You usually can get a medication abortion up to 70 days (10 weeks) after the first day of your last period. If it has been 71 days or more since the first day of your last period, you can have an in-clinic abortion to end your pregnancy.

HOW LONG DO MEDICAL ABORTIONS TAKE?

It can take anywhere from about a day to 3-4 weeks from the time a woman takes the first medication until the medical abortion is completed. The majority of women who take mifepristone will abort within four hours of using misoprostol. About 95% will have a complete abortion within a week. Some will take longer and may use additional doses of misoprostol.

IS AN ABORTION SAFE?

Abortions are very safe. The earlier the abortion is done, the lower the chance of any complications. It is important to remember that with any procedure there is always some risk of infection or bleeding.

IS AN ABORTION PAINFUL?

During the abortion, either a local anesthetic (freezing of the cervix) or general anesthetic (making you unconscious) is given. You may have cramping (like a heavy menstrual period) for a short time. Extra medication is available for pain, if needed.

WILL I BE ABLE TO HAVE CHILDREN AFTER HAVING AN ABORTION?

Yes. If you have had an abortion, you can get pregnant again and have a normal pregnancy in the future.

WHAT HAPPENS DURING A MEDICAL ABORTION?

This procedure must be done before the 7th week of pregnancy and is only available at certain clinics. It requires a number of visits to the clinic. A drug is injected into the hip muscle and stops the growth of the pregnancy. Another drug is put into the vagina to make the uterus contract and the embryo then comes out with some blood. This process can take a few days to 2 weeks. Blood tests may be necessary to ensure that some hormones have decreased and you are no longer pregnant. Sometimes the medication does not work and a surgical abortion is necessary.

DO TEENAGERS NEED THEIR PARENT'S CONSENT?

Procedures can be performed as long as it is clear to the health professional staff that you understand what is happening and can give consent once you know all the facts. It is helpful, especially if you are young, to tell a parent or a person that you trust so you have someone for support. Hospitals, clinics and health insurance plans must keep all medical procedures confidential.



DO TEENAGERS NEED THEIR PARENT'S CONSENT?

Be sure to follow the instructions given to you by the clinic or hospital.

Be sure to follow the instructions given to you by the clinic or hospital. Bleeding can last from a few days to 3 weeks but the amount of blood lost is not large. You may only have spotting but for others the bleeding may be heavier. Sometimes there are clots which can cause cramping. Bleeding may stop and restart.

Cramping similar to period cramps is normal after an abortion. Using a hot water bottle or massaging your belly can help to relieve cramps. Do not take aspirin as that may increase the bleeding. The clinic will tell you which pain medication you can use.

MORE FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

HOW MUCH DOES AN ABORTION COST?

Abortion is free in government hospitals and clinics. In private facilities like Marie Stopes, medical abortions cost around R2,000 in 2022. Surgical abortions cost from R2,000 to R6,500.

Medical aids must include voluntary abortion because it is listed as a minimum benefit established by the council for medical schemes. Consult your doctor for more information.

 All registered medical schemes in South Africa are required to offer a set of defined benefits known as Prescribed Minimum Benefits (PMBs) to each and every one of its members.



WHAT SHOULD I EXPECT AFTER AN ABORTION?

Remember to follow the instructions given to you by the clinic or hospital. After an abortion, bleeding and cramping may occur for the next 2-3 weeks. Bleeding can last from a few days to 3 weeks, but the amount of blood lost is not great. You may just have spotting, but others may bleed more heavily.

Sometimes there are clots which can cause cramping. Bleeding may stop and restart. ☐ Cramping similar to period cramps is normal after an abortion. Using a hot water bottle or massaging your belly can help to relieve cramps. Do not take aspirin as that may increase the bleeding. The clinic will tell you which pain medication you can use.

WHAT YOU SHOULD DO IF YOU EXPERIENCE SYMPTOMS

Pregnancy symptoms such as breast tenderness, nausea and fatigue may last for a few days but should disappear by the second week after the procedure. You should be able to resume normal activities (such as work or school) the day after the abortion. You should avoid strenuous activity for a few days.

After an abortion, the cervix is slightly open, increasing the risk of infection

Do not insert anything into the vagina for the next two weeks. That is:
no sexual intercourse
use napkins instead of tampons
shower only - no jacuzzis, baths or swimming

Heavy bleeding, soaking one or more pads for 1 hour, body temperature above 38°C (100. °F) OR Chills lasting more than a day, severe abdominal pain, and bad-smelling vaginal discharge are all possible signs of an infection or other complications.

Call the doctor at the abortion clinic or go immediately to the emergency room of the hospital if you have any of these problems.

WHAT ABOUT BIRTH CONTROL?

After an abortion, you can get pregnant again if you had unprotected sex before your first period. Many clinics offer birth control methods before you leave, or you will need to see your doctor in the coming weeks to discuss which birth control method is right for you.

Your period should arrive within the next -6 weeks. If you started using the birth control pill, patch or ring, your period will start at the end of the first pack.

Remember that condoms prevent pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections (STIs), including HIV and hepatitis B.

KNOW YOUR RIGHTS, KNOW YOUR OPTIONS

Here's what you need to know from.

The choice is and always will be yours. Your body, your choice. But that still doesn't make it any easier. Especially if you don't know where to safely perform the procedure. You may see many promotional flyers offer same day abortions for a little as R200, but chances are they may not be safe.

Women of all ages have the right to legal and safe abortions. It means that it doesn't matter what age you are or what other people have to say. You can go to a government hospital or a public health clinic for a safe abortion in South Africa. Get free help and support here. Private doctors and non-profit organizations trained and qualified to perform abortions are also legal and safe options.



HOW WILL YOU FEEL?

Your reaction to having an abortion is unique and personal. Let how you feel be your guide. Whatever you are feeling, it is helpful to talk to a supportive person. If you feel that speaking with a counselor would help you, if you have more questions or just want to talk, call Peel Health or the clinic where you had your procedure. Ask the clinic for their website as it will have specific information about the clinic and the procedure.



In South Africa, abortion is legal up to the 20th week of pregnancy. This has been the case since November 1996. Termination is possible after 20 weeks, but only if your life is in danger or your baby cannot survive.

KNOW YOUR RIGHTS, KNOW YOUR OPTIONS

You can contact Department of Health and Wellness or directly via Government hospitals, designated private doctors and gynaecologists and non-profit organizations like Marie Stopes. Be aware that some individuals or organizations may discourage you from seeking an abortion.

Termination of pregnancy is free of charge at primary healthcare facilities and when referred up the line. Ambulance services are also free of charge for women who have an abortion.

You can reach out to us here at Kwanele South Africa for any assistance you may need in getting started. Please visit our website at www.kwanelesouthafrica.org

The Marie Stopes website is also full of useful tips and facts. You can call them on 0800 11 77 85.

Some helpful websites:

mariestopes.org.za
centralwomensclinic.co.za
genderjustice.org.za
soulcity.org.za
safe2choose.org
bhekisia.org

