

Medication Abortion Fact Sheet

What is Medication Abortion?

Medication abortion (also called “the abortion pill”), uses a combination of two medications to end an early pregnancy. It is an option for women who are 9 weeks pregnant (63 days) or less. Mifepristone, the first medication, blocks the hormone needed to maintain the pregnancy. Misoprostol, the second medication, causes the uterus to contract, with the pregnancy usually passing within a few hours. The process is similar to what happens during a miscarriage.

How Does The Process Work?

A minimum of two appointments is necessary, and sometimes more. At the first appointment, an ultrasound exam and other screening tests are performed, to make sure that medication abortion is a safe option for you. A clinician reviews your health history, and any questions you have are answered. You take the first medication orally before leaving the clinic.

The second medication is sent home with you, along with other medications and instructions that you will need. You use the second medication on the second or third day of the abortion process, and will need to set aside several hours (or longer) in order to complete this part of the process. Strong cramping and heavy vaginal bleeding is expected, and may begin shortly after the second medication is used. Many women pass the pregnancy in 8 hours or less, but sometimes it takes longer. Pain medication is provided, but may not relieve all of the cramping.

A second appointment is scheduled, usually one week after the first appointment. Returning for this appointment is necessary, so that you can be certain that you have passed the entire pregnancy. Your clinician determines this through the use of ultrasound, and sometimes other screening tests. For some women, additional medication, testing, or other treatment (including a surgical abortion procedure) is necessary.

Are There Side Effects?

Common side effects include heavy bleeding and cramping, headache, nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, shivering/chills, fever, and fatigue. Light bleeding and cramps can continue for days or weeks. All other side effects should resolve within 24 hours.

Is Medication Abortion Right For Me?

You may want to consider medication abortion if you:

- Are no more than 9 weeks into the pregnancy;
- Are at least 18 years old;
- Can agree to return to the clinic for one (and sometimes more) follow-up appointments;
- Have access to a telephone and transportation, and live no more than a 1-hour driving distance from an emergency room;
- Will agree to have a surgical abortion, if it becomes necessary.

For some women, medication abortion may not be the safest option. Our staff will explain the options that are available to you, and can assist you in deciding which option best meets your needs.

Is It Safe?

In the United States, medication abortion became available in 2000, and thousands of American women have used it since then. Worldwide, it has been safely used by millions of women. As with most medical treatments, however, there are certain risks that you need to understand. There have been six reported deaths following medication abortion with mifepristone and misoprostol, all caused by infection with a bacteria called *Clostridium sordellii*. Despite thorough investigation, no explanation for why these deaths occurred has been found.

The risk of death from this type of abortion is approximately 1 in 100,000. In comparison, the risk of death from a surgical abortion procedure performed in the first 8 weeks of pregnancy is approximately 1 in 1,000,000 (one in a million). With a continued pregnancy and delivery, the risk of death is much higher, at approximately 1 in 10,000. In some cases, a surgical procedure or treatment in a hospital is necessary. If the pregnancy continues to grow, a surgical abortion is also necessary.

If you are concerned about what you are experiencing at any time, you can always call us. Qualified staff are available to assist you 24 hours a day.

24-Hour Assistance:

1-800-338-1361

Surgical Abortion Fact Sheet

What is Surgical Abortion?

With surgical abortion (also called vacuum aspiration), a doctor uses surgical instruments and gentle suction to end a pregnancy. This is an option for women who are up to 24 weeks pregnant. There are several options available to help with any pain that may be experienced during, and after, the abortion.

How Does The Process Work?

A minimum of two appointments is usually necessary. At the first appointment, an ultrasound exam and other screening tests are performed. Your health history is reviewed, your options are reviewed with you, and any questions you have are answered. On the day of your surgery, you can expect to be at the clinic for several hours.

If you are in the first trimester, the abortion should take less than 10 minutes to complete. A female staff member is in the room with you throughout the procedure. First, the doctor inserts a speculum into your vagina and administers numbing medication. Sterilized instruments are then used to gently stretch open the cervix (the opening to the uterus). A small tube is inserted into the uterus, and this is attached to a device which suctions out the pregnancy tissue.

If you are in the second trimester, extra steps are needed to prepare your cervix for the procedure. You may need to arrive at the clinic early, and receive a medication that softens the cervix. Or, you may need to have small sticks of seaweed, called laminaria, inserted through your cervix. The laminaria are left in place overnight, and cause your cervix to slowly dilate.

After your surgery, a nurse monitors your vital signs and bleeding. The recovery time is usually an hour or less.

Are There Side Effects?

You may have light to moderate bleeding and cramps for several days, off and on. Depending on the type of anesthesia that you receive, you may feel tired for several hours or have nausea and vomiting.

Is Surgical Abortion Right For Me?

You may want to consider surgical abortion if you:

- Want the abortion to be completed as soon as possible;
- Do not have a friend or family member that you can tell about the abortion;
- Would prefer to have anesthesia for the abortion;
- Are not able to return to the clinic for multiple required appointments;
- Would prefer to have clinical staff present with you during the abortion process.

Is It Safe?

In the United States, surgical abortion became legally available in 1973, and millions of procedures have been performed. Surgical abortion is one of the safest surgical procedures in the world. As with most medical treatments, however, there are certain risks that you need to understand.

The risk of death from this type of abortion, when performed in the first 8 weeks of pregnancy, is approximately 1 in 1,000,000 (one in a million). In the second trimester, the risk is slightly higher. The risk of death from a continued pregnancy and delivery is much higher, at approximately 1 in 10,000. The risk of death from a medication abortion with mifepristone and misoprostol is approximately 1 in 100,000.

In rare cases, a second surgical aspiration procedure or treatment in a hospital is required. There are also risks related to each type of anesthesia that is available. General anesthesia carries the highest risk of complications.

If you are concerned about what you are experiencing at any time, you can always call us. Qualified staff are available to assist you 24 hours a day.

24-Hour Assistance:
1-800-338-1361