

Unplanned Pregnancy: What Should I Do?



If you become pregnant but did not plan the pregnancy, you will need to choose whether or not you want to stay pregnant. This is a common problem because about half of the women who get pregnant in the United States did not plan to be pregnant. If you think you are pregnant, you should see your health care provider to be sure.

What are my pregnancy options?

It is normal to have many different feelings when you find out you are pregnant. You may feel scared, upset, happy, or excited. Your first decision will be whether to stay pregnant or end the pregnancy. If you plan to stay pregnant, you will need to decide if you will keep the baby or give up the baby for adoption. If you decide to end the pregnancy, you may have a choice about what type of abortion you can have. The table on the next page lists questions to ask yourself as you think about your options. These are important decisions that only you can make, and you will want to know as much as possible about your choices.

What if I decide to keep the baby?

Parenting is a big job that has both high and low times. Children need your time and care. If you decide to become a parent, you will be responsible for your child's life in every way, and your life will change in many ways so you can take care of yourself and another person. The questions on the next page will help you consider some of the changes that come with being a parent.

What if I decide to give up the baby for adoption?

Adoption is a legal agreement between you and another person or family who will become your baby's parents. Women who choose adoption often do so because they feel that someone else can provide a better home for their child than they can. You can decide how much contact you want with your child. This can be anything from no contact at all to regular contact. Depending on the state where you live, you can have an agency or a lawyer who helps you find a home for your baby. It is very important that you get good advice from an adoption professional before you make this permanent decision.

What if I decide to have an abortion?

There are 2 types of abortion. Early in pregnancy, you can take medicine to make your body pass the pregnancy tissue at home. You also can have a medical procedure to remove the pregnancy tissue. In early pregnancy, a simple procedure can be done in a clinic or health care provider's office. It may be called aspiration, vacuum, suction, or surgical abortion. Later in pregnancy, the procedure must be done in a hospital or special clinic.

Who can help me with my decision?

Choosing what to do about a pregnancy can be a very hard decision to make. Talking with a professional about your choices can be helpful. This is called options counseling. The counselor or health care provider who does options counseling will give you information about 1) resources for parenting, 2) licensed adoption agencies and lawyers, and 3) where you can obtain a safe abortion. If you go to a clinic that counsels women who have unplanned pregnancies, make sure they will talk to you about all of your choices equally. Some clinics, often called crisis pregnancy centers, try to talk women into or out of a certain choice. You also may want to talk to other people you trust as you make this important decision. A husband, partner, family member, health care provider, counselor, pastor, or close friend may be a good support person for you.

How soon do I need to make my decision?

You will want to make your decision as early in your pregnancy as possible. If you plan to have the baby, seeking early care can help you and the baby stay as healthy as possible. If you plan to end the pregnancy, having an early abortion is safest. Also, the laws for how late in the pregnancy you can have an abortion are different depending on what state you live in, so it is best to have an abortion as soon as you know this is your decision. If you wait too long, it may be too late to have an abortion.

What should I do if I plan to continue the pregnancy?

You should see a health care provider regularly during your pregnancy. This is called prenatal care. During prenatal visits you will be checked for health problems that could affect you or the baby. You also can start making lifestyle changes. One of the best things you can do to help your baby be healthy is to not smoke, drink alcohol, or take drugs when you are pregnant. You also will want to eat healthy foods and exercise most days of the week. If you have any medical problems such as diabetes or hypertension (high blood pressure), it is best to call your health care provider as soon as you find out you are pregnant so you can start prenatal care as soon as possible.

Questions to Ask Yourself Before You Make Your Decision

If You Are Thinking About Raising a Child:

- What are my feelings about being a parent and taking care of another person?
- Does becoming a parent feel like what is best for me at this time in my life?
- Am I ready to take care of all my child's needs?
- Am I ready to love a child now?
- Am I ready to have less time for myself, more stress, and deal with the money needed to support a child?
- What would it mean for my future if I have a child now?
- Can I handle being pregnant, giving birth, and raising a child?
- Is anyone pressuring me to continue the pregnancy?
- Do I have support from my family and friends?

If You Are Thinking About Adoption:

- What are my feelings about adoption and another person being my baby's parent?
- Does adoption feel like what is best for me at this time in my life?
- Can I go through pregnancy and birth then give my baby to someone else?
- Will I be able to cope with the feeling of loss that I may have after the pregnancy is over?
- Is anyone pressuring me to choose adoption?
- Do I have support from my family and friends?

If You Are Thinking About Abortion:

- What are my feelings about abortion and ending this pregnancy?
- Does having an abortion feel like what is best for me at this time in my life?
- Would I rather have a child at another time?
- Would I be willing to tell a parent or go before a judge before having an abortion if that is the law in the state where I live?
- Is anyone pressuring me to have or not have an abortion?
- Do I have support from my family and friends?

Adapted from www.plannedparenthood.org

For More Information

Backline

1-888-493-0092

This free talk line offers a safe place to talk about your feelings and decisions related to pregnancy, parenting, abortion, and adoption. They provide unconditional support before, during, and after your pregnancy, no matter which options you are considering or what decisions you have already made.

Pregnancy Options Workbook

<http://www.pregnancyoptions.info/pregnant.htm>

Pregnancy Options

<http://www.plannedparenthood.org/health-topics/pregnancy/pregnant-now-what-4253.htm>

Are You Pregnant and Thinking About Adoption?

http://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/f_pregna/f_pregna.pdf

This page may be reproduced for noncommercial use by health care professionals to share with clients. Any other reproduction is subject to the Journal of Midwifery & Women's Health's approval. The information and recommendations appearing on this page are appropriate in most instances, but they are not a substitute for medical diagnosis. For specific information concerning your personal medical condition, the Journal of Midwifery & Women's Health suggests that you consult your health care provider.