



EARLY TERMINATION OF PREGNANCY

In early pregnancy, two kinds of abortions can be used to end a pregnancy. In one, pills are used to end the pregnancy. In the other, a health care provider uses surgical instruments to perform the abortion. The decision to end a pregnancy is very personal. This handout is to be used as you discuss this decision with your provider and support people.

What Is Medication Abortion?

Medication abortion is also referred to as “medical abortion,” “nonsurgical abortion,” or “the abortion pill.” With medication abortion, medicines (mifepristone and misoprostol) are used to cause the abortion. Mifepristone stops the pregnancy from growing and misoprostol causes cramping which expels the pregnancy from the uterus or womb. Misoprostol may be used alone and is very effective, but not as effective as using the two medicines together. Having a medication abortion is a lot like having a miscarriage.

What Is Aspiration Abortion?

Aspiration abortion is also called “surgical abortion,” “vacuum abortion,” “suction abortion,” or “D&C.” A health care provider inserts a small tube through the cervix into the uterus. Then the provider uses either a handheld suction device or an electrical suction machine to empty the uterus.

What Can I Expect?

With medication abortion, your health care provider will tell you how many pills to take and when to take them. It usually takes a few days from the first dose of medicine until the process is completed. Bleeding usually begins a few hours after the last dose of pills. Bleeding builds up over a couple of hours, and you will want to be close to a bathroom. You will probably feel sick to your stomach and have painful cramping. You will have been given medicine to help with this. Most women have a few hours of heavy bleeding and cramps. Then, the bleeding slows down and the cramps go away. You need to return to your health care provider in a week or so to make sure the abortion is complete.

Most aspiration abortions take place in a clinic. Some are done in an office or hospital. The actual procedure takes 5–10 minutes. The health care provider will place a speculum in your vagina like when you have a Pap smear. Then she will insert a tube into your uterus to remove the pregnancy. You may be awake or asleep during the procedure. If you are awake, you will feel some cramping during the procedure for a few minutes. You may be given medicine to help with the cramping. You need to return to your health care provider in 1–2 weeks.

How Much Bleeding Is Too Much?

Bleeding is safe. It is a sign that the abortion is working. If you have bleeding that soaks more than 2 pads an hour for more than 2 hours, call your health care provider. If you pass clots bigger than a lemon, call your health care provider.

What About Future Pregnancy or Health Concerns?

There is no link between abortion and breast cancer, tubal pregnancy, or birth defects. Having an abortion does not lower your chances of getting pregnant or staying pregnant in the future.

Comparison of Medication and Aspiration Abortion

	Medication Abortion	Aspiration Abortion
What happens?	Causes a miscarriage-like process to empty the uterus	Medical instruments are used to empty the uterus
When can it be done?	Can be done up to 9 weeks from the first day of your last period	Can be done up to 14–16 weeks from the first day of your last period
How long does it take?	May take several days to complete	Takes only a few minutes to complete
Is it safe?	Very safe—much safer than continuing the pregnancy	Very safe—much safer than continuing the pregnancy
Does it work?	92%–96% success	>99% success
Do I need anesthesia?	Anesthesia is not needed	You may have anesthesia, which has other risks
How much bleeding will I have?	Heavier bleeding and cramping for a longer period of time	Less bleeding and less cramping for less time
What are the side effects?	Nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, cramping, headache	Cramping, bleeding, nausea, light-headedness
Where does it happen?	You decide when and where to do the abortion	Procedure is performed by a health care provider in a clinic, office, or hospital
Can I have someone with me?	Your support person can stay with you all the time	You may not be able to have your support person with you during the abortion

Where Can I Get an Abortion?

- www.gynpages.com lists abortion providers.
- www.plannedparenthood.org lists abortion providers. For information, call free: 1-800-230-7526.
- www.prochoice.org lists abortion providers. It also describes the laws and restrictions around abortion in each state. Call free: 1-800-772-9100.

What If I Can't Afford an Abortion?

The National Network of Abortion Funds offers help in paying for an abortion. To see if your area has an abortion fund, check the state-by-state list of funds on their Web site: www.nnaf.org, or call 617-524-6040.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Abortion Facts

www.prochoice.org/about_abortion/facts/

The National Abortion Federation has several fact sheets that cover topics related to abortion and abortion care.

Backline

www.yourbackline.org

Backline has a free Talk Line (1-888-493-0092) for women and their loved ones to talk about pregnancy, parenting, abortion, and adoption.

Feminist Women's Health Center

www.fwhc.org/abortion/index.htm

This site has a section on personal experiences of abortion, which includes stories from women and clinic staff.

PregnancyOptions.info

www.pregnancyoptions.info

This site provides information on pregnancy options and includes a workbook to help women who are choosing between abortion, adoption, and parenting.

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