

Your body, your choice

A brief guide to
abortion care

About this leaflet

This leaflet will give you a brief guide to abortion care options. It is organised into 4 sections. Further information is available on the MSI Reproductive Choices UK website:

www.MSIChoices.org.uk

24-hour support and appointment information is available by calling **0345 300 8090**.

Contents:

Finding out you're pregnant	P3
If you need to talk	P5
Your abortion questions, answered	P7
Arranging your appointment	P14

We recognise that not all of our patients will identify as a woman. We welcome and support people of all gender identities to access abortion care services when they choose.

Finding out you're pregnant

We understand that it can be distressing to find that you are pregnant unexpectedly, or unintentionally. Try not to worry, we are here to support you.

First, you should take a pregnancy test if your pregnancy has not been confirmed.

You can buy home testing kits at pharmacies and supermarkets. Your GP, contraception and sexual health clinic, specialist young people's clinics like Brook, and some pharmacies can also provide free pregnancy testing.

After a positive pregnancy test result you can find out how many weeks pregnant you are (gestation) by counting back the days to the first day of your last monthly period. If you know the date of the first day of your last monthly period, we can help you to work out your gestation.

If you have irregular periods, no periods, or if the stage of the pregnancy is unclear, your gestation can be checked with an ultrasound scan. Your gestation will determine what options are available to you, so it's important to find this out.

If you have an unintended pregnancy, and you're not sure what to do, you have three choices to think about:

- Continue with the pregnancy and raise a child.
- Continue with the pregnancy and consider adoption or fostering.
- End the pregnancy through abortion.

If you need to talk

If you have had an unexpected positive pregnancy test, you may have mixed feelings about the pregnancy and your options.

If you feel unable to talk to friends or family, you can speak to a MSI Reproductive Choices UK counsellor, to your GP or to a contraception and sexual health clinic. Any conversation with us about your options or counselling will always be confidential.

The decision about whether to continue or end the pregnancy is yours to make. This might not be the same decision your friends or family would make.

If your pregnancy was planned, but sadly after antenatal screening you have been told of a serious fetal anomaly, we can talk you through all the options available and will be there for you during this difficult time.

Counselling

If you feel that you would like to speak to a counsellor to talk through your decision, call us for a counselling appointment. We can arrange a face-to-face counselling appointment in one of our clinics, or a phone appointment at a time that suits you.

All NHS patients are entitled to free counselling sessions. If you are paying privately for your abortion care, private counselling is also available. Counselling appointments can be made both before and after having an abortion.

Counselling appointments can be made by calling our 24-hour advice line on **0345 300 8090**.

Your abortion questions, answered

What is an abortion?

An abortion is a way of ending a pregnancy. There are two types of treatment: **medical abortion (abortion pills)** or **surgical abortion**.

The kind of abortion you can be offered will depend on a few factors. Your gestation (how many weeks pregnant you are), past medical and gynaecological history, any medication you are taking and your personal choice will determine which method is best for you.

What is a medical abortion?

Medical abortion (or abortion tablets) involves taking two sets of tablets to end a pregnancy. There are two different medicines used.

The first is called mifepristone. It stops the pregnancy from growing by blocking the hormone progesterone, and causes separation of the pregnancy from the wall of the womb. You would take this at the clinic.

The second medication is called misoprostol. It causes the softening and opening of the cervix (neck of the womb) and contractions of the womb so that the pregnancy passes through the vagina. You will experience cramping and bleeding similar to a miscarriage. The tablets can be taken in the clinic, either on the same day as taking the mifepristone tablet, or a day or two later. If you are eligible, the second tablets can be given to you to take home for you to administer yourself, if you wish to do so. You will be given detailed instructions about when and how to use the tablets. At MSI Reproductive Choices UK, medical abortion is available up to 9 weeks + 6 days (9 weeks + 3 days in smaller clinics) of pregnancy.

What is a surgical abortion?

Surgical abortion involves the pregnancy being removed through your vagina by an experienced doctor using vacuum aspiration (a suction method) or dilatation and evacuation (D&E).

Before 12 weeks of pregnancy the pregnancy is removed from the womb by suction through the cervix (neck of the womb) and vagina.

After 12 weeks of pregnancy, cervical preparation medication and slender specialised instruments will also be used to dilate (gently open the cervix). Once the cervix is opened, a suction method is used. At higher gestations, slender specialised instruments will also be used to remove the pregnancy. This is called dilatation and evacuation (D&E).

Your gestation (how many weeks pregnant you are) and your medical history will affect the surgical abortion procedure offered to you.

At MSI Reproductive Choices UK, surgical abortion is available up to 23 weeks + 6 days of pregnancy.

Can I have anaesthetic with a surgical abortion?

There are three anaesthetic options for the surgical abortion procedure which are possible at MSI Reproductive Choices UK.

- **No anaesthesia**

This is suitable for patients under 10 weeks gestation, especially if you have given birth vaginally before.

- **Sedation anaesthesia**

Sedation is quick acting and lighter than a general anaesthetic. You may not be aware of what is happening and you are not likely to remember the procedure. Sedation lets you recover quickly and return to your everyday activities soon after your procedure.

- **General anaesthesia**

General anaesthesia is a combination of medications that put you in a sleep-like state before the procedure. Under general anaesthetic, you don't feel pain because you're completely unconscious. You are not likely to remember the procedure.

We can talk about which option would be recommended for you, given your gestation (how many weeks you have been pregnant) and medical history.

Are abortions safe?

Abortion is very safe when performed by specialists in clinics such as MSI Reproductive Choices UK.

We follow the World Health Organisation recommendations to provide safe manual or electric vacuum aspiration for surgical abortion up to 14 weeks + 6 days of pregnancy, and then dilatation and evacuation (D&E) procedures up to 23 weeks and 6 days of pregnancy.

We also provide medical abortion up to 9 weeks + 6 days of pregnancy using mifepristone and misoprostol tablets also recommended by World Health Organisation.

Any medical treatment or surgical procedure carries some risks, so we will give all this information to you before you would consent for treatment.

Will having an abortion increase my risk of developing breast cancer?

No. The World Health Organisation has published data showing no link between abortion and breast cancer, and no increased risk.

Will having an abortion make it difficult for me to get pregnant in the future?

It will be possible to become pregnant again almost immediately after an abortion. If you don't wish to become pregnant, it's important to start using contraception immediately. We can give you information and advice about contraception options, and can provide your chosen method.

Does an embryo or fetus feel pain during an abortion?

Medical evidence suggests that a fetus cannot feel pain before 24 weeks of pregnancy. This is because the nervous system is not fully developed.

Will you tell my GP about my appointment?

If you choose to call us directly for an appointment, your GP doesn't have to be told about your abortion referral or any treatment if you don't want them to know. There are some occasions when we might need to contact your GP for information regarding any ongoing investigations or treatment. However, this will only be done with your consent.

If you are under 16 years old, our doctors might need to share treatment details with your GP.

How will I feel after my abortion?

Everyone is different and can feel a range of emotions around the decision to end a pregnancy. You may feel relieved or sad, or a mixture of both.

If you need to talk through your feelings at any time after your abortion, we can arrange a counselling appointment for you.

Is an abortion painful?

The physical effects of a medical abortion and a surgical abortion are different, and will be explained to you in more detail at your consultation. You will be given advice on using pain relief tablets such as paracetamol, codeine, or ibuprofen at your appointment.

If you ever feel worried about your recovery after an abortion, we have a 24-hour aftercare line where a nurse can assess you over the phone. Our aftercare nurses can be contacted on **0345 122 1441**.

Arranging your appointment

After you have thought about your treatment options, you can begin to arrange your appointments.

Call us to book a consultation

You can call us any time to arrange your appointment. Appointment wait times can vary. We advise that you give us a call as soon as you can if you know that abortion is the best option for you. Unfortunately, walk-in on the day appointments are not available, so please do book in advance.

We will arrange your consultation, either over the phone or face-to-face. We will ask for your reasons for wanting an abortion, as we are legally required to do so. We'll take your full medical history and may need you to have some tests to make sure treatment is safe for you. If you have a serious medical condition, it may be safest to have your abortion in an NHS hospital setting. We will arrange the referral for you.

Call our 24-hour advice line:
0345 300 8090

Call us to speak to a counsellor

If you feel that you would like to speak to a counsellor to talk through your decision, we can arrange a counselling appointment for you before your consultation appointment.

About MSI Reproductive Choices UK

MSI Reproductive Choices UK is a specialist independent provider of sexual and reproductive health services in the UK. We are part of the world-leading reproductive and sexual health charity MSI Reproductive Choices, based in almost 40 countries around the world.

Here in the UK, we have over 60 locations and strive to provide a local supportive service for women and men. Through our team of highly skilled doctors, nurses, midwives, counsellors and healthcare assistants we provide reproductive and sexual health services including abortion, vasectomy, and contraception.



**Information &
appointments (24 hours):
0345 300 8090
services@MSIChoices.org.uk
www.MSIChoices.org.uk**

MSI Reproductive Choices UK
1 Conway Street
Fitzroy Square
London W1T 6LP
United Kingdom

MSI Reproductive Choices UK, Mar 2021. MSI Reproductive Choices is a registered charity in England and Wales (reg no. 265543). Company reg no. 1102208. If you have any questions or comments about this leaflet, or would like information on the evidence used to produce it, please email marketing@MSIChoices.org.uk. The information given in this booklet was accurate at the time of going to print. This publication will be reviewed annually. For the latest information visit MSIChoices.org.uk