

factsheet

MEDICAL ABORTION INFORMATION

What is medical abortion?

Medical abortion is when you take medications to end a pregnancy. It is a two-step process that involves taking one type of medication to end the pregnancy and a second type of medication to make the uterus contract to remove the pregnancy. These medications can be used when your pregnancy is 9 weeks or less. Medical abortion is an alternative option to surgical abortion which happens in a special clinic under sedation. Talk to your doctor or nurse about which is the best choice for you.

What medications will I need to take?

MS2-step:

- Step 1 – mifepristone
- Step 2 – misoprostol

Pain relief and anti-nausea medications are also recommended.

How will I need to take the medications?

Before you start, you will need to make sure you:

- are within 2 hours travel of a hospital with an emergency department for the next 14 days in case you have any complications
- have a responsible adult with you for at least 24 hours after step 2 is taken – this may be a family member, friend or partner
- are in a safe and comfortable place (e.g. at home).

WARNING: once Step 1 has been taken, the abortion has begun, and Step 2 **MUST** be completed. Your doctor or nurse will explain exactly how to take the medications.

Step 1

- a single tablet (mifepristone) is swallowed with a glass of water

Step 2 - taken between 36 to 48 hours after Step 1

- half an hour before Step 2, take your pain and nausea medication to help with the cramps and pain and to reduce nausea or vomiting
- Step 2 includes four tablets (misoprostol) which are taken by placing two tablets in each side of your mouth between your cheek and gums until they have dissolved

What can I expect after taking the medication?

Talk to your doctor or nurse about what to expect during a medical abortion.

- vaginal bleeding – this usually starts within 4 hours of Step 2; bleeding can range from light to heavy and is usually more than a typical period
- cramping and pain – this can range from mild to severe
- other side effects can usually last less than 24 hours and can include diarrhoea, headache, nausea and vomiting, dizziness, flushing, shivering or chills
- you must seek medical help if you have a fever over 38°C

What are the risks and complications of medical abortion?

Bleeding

- heavy blood loss requiring treatment can happen but is uncommon

Infection

- infections following a medical abortion need early treatment to avoid serious illness or issues with future attempts to become pregnant
- infection requiring treatment in hospital is rare

Incomplete abortion

- this may cause ongoing heavy bleeding and pain due to pregnancy tissue remaining in the uterus after the abortion
- this occurs in up to 5% of medical abortions

Continuing pregnancy

- further treatment with another dose of medications or a surgical procedure may be needed
- continuing pregnancy occurs in less than 1% of medical abortions

Seek medical advice if:

- you are soaking two or more sanitary pads per hour in the first 24 hours after Step 2, or are still needing to change your sanitary pad every hour after this time
- you experience continuing abdominal pain, feel unwell and weak, have usual vaginal discharge or have a fever



What will I need to do after taking the medications?

You will need to have a blood test 7 days after you take Step 1. This blood test result will be compared to a blood test result collected before your abortion and helps confirm that the abortion has been successful.

A nurse will contact you by phone or SMS to advise if you need to return urgently to see the doctor.

It is essential that you attend your follow up appointment to confirm that your abortion is complete, and that you have no complications.

Avoid placing anything in your vagina for 7 days after you take the abortion medication to reduce the risk of infection. This includes:

- using sanitary pads instead of tampons or menstrual cups
- having showers instead of baths
- no swimming
- no sexual intercourse

Contraception after medical abortion

Your fertility can return quickly after an abortion. If you do not want another pregnancy, it is recommended you start contraception as soon as possible.

Excluding IUDs, all methods of contraception can be commenced immediately after medical abortion. IUDs can be inserted after the pregnancy tissue has passed and the abortion is complete.

Hormonal methods of contraception are immediately effective if started within 5 days of taking Step 1.

Talk to your doctor or nurse about which contraceptive method might be best for you.

What do I do if I want more information before my appointment?

You can:

- call Talkline on 1300 658 886 to speak with a nurse
- make another appointment with the nurse at your local Family Planning Australia clinic

For more information

- Visit your nearest Family Planning Australia clinic fpnsw.org.au/clinics
- Chat to a nurse via Talkline – 1300 658 886 or fpnsw.org.au/talkline
- National Relay Service (for people who are d/Deaf, hard of hearing or have speech communication difficulties) – 133 677
- Translating and Interpreting Service (TIS National) – 131 450
- Family Planning Australia client resource – Pregnant? Working through your options
- Family Planning Australia client resource on contraception – Family Planning NSW client resource on contraception – What suits me? fpnsw.org.au/health-information/contraception/contraception-options
- Visit your nearest Family Planning Australia clinic – www.fpnsw.org.au/clinics
- Children by Choice – www.childrenbychoice.org.au.