

How will I feel?

Making the decision to have an abortion can be difficult and painful, but ultimately it is your choice. It can be much less traumatic physically and emotionally than having an unwanted child. A small percentage of women have long-term feelings of guilt and some feel that it was a mistake. Many women feel relieved once the abortion is over and see their decision as regrettable but necessary. At least a third of all women will have had an abortion by age 45.

How safe is it?

The safest and easiest time to have an abortion is within the first three months of a pregnancy. Complications are rare – less than 1% of women have to have the procedure repeated because fragments of pregnancy remain in the womb and cause persistent bleeding and 1-2% of women have an infection and are treated with antibiotics. One or two women per thousand will have a serious complication and are likely to experience reduced fertility or be unable to conceive again. If you have had an abortion without incident, studies indicate there should be no increase in future fertility/pregnancy complications.

How do I get an abortion?

To get an abortion, you need to get a referral from two doctors, usually your GP and a doctor at the abortion clinic or hospital. You can also see the Well Woman Clinic or Caledonia Youth. Doctors may refuse on the grounds of conscience, but they must refer you to another doctor who can help. If you feel your doctor hasn't handled your request appropriately you can inform the local Primary Care Trust.

You can also contact the British Pregnancy Advisory Service on 08457 304030 to arrange a private abortion. It costs between £380 and £950 depending on the stage of the pregnancy, and they provide post-abortion counseling for free. Women may choose this option if they are not eligible for an NHS abortion, if they are not comfortable asking their own GP for help, and/or because it can be arranged quickly.

How is it carried out?

There are different methods of having an abortion depending on what stage your pregnancy is at.

Early medical abortion – up to 9 weeks

You will be given two appointments, two days apart. At each appointment you will be given a tablet; together they induce a miscarriage. It can be painful, like a very heavy period, and you may feel sick or get diarrhea from the medication.

Vacuum aspiration abortion – 5-15 weeks

Gentle suction is used to remove the fetus. You may have a tablet placed inside your vagina a few hours before, and you will be given a general or local anesthetic. The procedure should take 5-10 minutes and you should be able to go home on the same day. You may have bleeding and cramps for up to 14 days.

Surgical dilation & evacuation – 15-19 weeks

This is also known as D&E. You will be given a general anesthetic and then narrow forceps and gentle suction will be used to remove the fetus, placenta and womb lining. It takes 10-120 minutes and you should be able to go home the same day. You may get cramping and bleeding for up to 14 days afterwards.

Late abortion – 20 to 24 weeks

There are two kinds of late abortion. A surgical two-stage abortion involves stopping the heartbeat of the fetus and then a D&E procedure the next day. A medically induced abortion uses medication to induce labour, which will lead to a late miscarriage, with a D&E done later to clear the womb. Both types require an overnight stay in hospital.

When is abortion legal?

Abortion is legal up to 24 weeks' gestation, or when there is a risk of serious permanent injury (or death) to the mother, or if the child, if born, would be seriously disabled. If an abortion is performed after 24 weeks' gestation it will most likely be because there is something very wrong with the baby.