

Cervical preparation

Before your surgical abortion procedure, we may use “cervical preparation” to help soften and relax the cervix (opening of the womb). Cervical preparation reduces the risk of damaging the cervix and helps with the safe completion of your procedure.

There are two ways to prepare your cervix – using misoprostol or osmotic dilators.

The information below explains the use of misoprostol. Osmotic dilators are generally only used with more advanced pregnancies. (See information on the other side of this page.)

What is misoprostol?

Misoprostol is a type of medicine called a prostaglandin. Misoprostol is commonly used for cervical preparation, although it is not registered in Australia for this use. When a medicine is used for reasons other than its registered use, this is known as “off-label” use.

As well as protecting your cervix, misoprostol also lowers the chance of retained pregnancy tissue or blood clot after the procedure.

You will need to wait between 1 to 3 hours after being given misoprostol for it to work. The time needed will depend on how many weeks pregnant you are and whether you have had a vaginal birth before.

During this time, you may have cramping, vaginal bleeding, chills, nausea and diarrhoea. In rare cases, you may miscarry the pregnancy during this time. If you think this is happening, tell a nurse or other staff member immediately.

Once misoprostol has been given, the abortion procedure has started. If you decide not to proceed with the abortion, there is a risk of damage to the fetus and of miscarriage at a later date.

Please note:

You must stay in the clinic after being given misoprostol until your procedure. In most cases your support person is welcome to stay with you during this time, or they may prefer to leave and come back at a later time.

You may notice other clients being called and moving through the clinic before you, even if they arrived after you. Clients may be attending the clinic for different types of appointments and procedures that need different preparation times.

Please be assured that we are providing care in the most appropriate time-frame for your circumstances.

Your total time spent in the clinic may be between 4 to 6 hours, depending on cervical preparation time.

What are osmotic dilators?

Osmotic dilators are small rods with a string attached to one end. Several rods are placed in the cervix, usually under intravenous sedation. The procedure only takes a few minutes. You will rest in the recovery area afterwards and be discharged home if the rods are to stay in overnight.

Once the rods have been put in, the abortion procedure is considered to have started. If you decide not to proceed with the abortion, there is a high risk of infection and miscarriage.

Over a period of several hours, the rods absorb moisture and swell up, gently opening the cervix and causing it to soften as well.

During this time, you may have nausea, cramping and vaginal bleeding. If the rods are staying in overnight, you may be prescribed pain relief medication to take at home. You may also notice some straw-coloured fluid leaking.

Occasionally the rods may fall out overnight, but this usually means that they have done their work. The longer they stay in the better, so don't try to pull them out. Make sure to tell the doctor if you think a rod may have come out.

Very rarely, the rods may cause the rapid start of miscarriage. If you think this is happening, tell a nurse or other staff member immediately if you're in-clinic. If you're at home, contact us immediately or go to your nearest Emergency Department.

If you are concerned about anything, phone Aftercare on 1300 888 0222 to speak with a nurse during business hours.



Call 1300 003 707

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