

Abortion Fact Sheet

What is an abortion?

An abortion, also known as termination of pregnancy, is a safe and common medical procedure used to end a pregnancy. This can be done with a surgical procedure or by taking medication that causes the contents of the uterus to be expelled.

In Australia, there are avenues for women in all states to access an abortion legally, but there are often gestation limits and, in Western Australia, a requirement to have a referral from your doctor stating you have discussed your decision with them.

Surgical abortion up to 20 weeks gestation is available in most Australian states. You must have a gestation of above 5 weeks to have a surgical abortion however, as the doctor must be able to confirm your pregnancy and this is very difficult before 5 weeks.

Deciding which abortion method is the right one for you

Surgical abortion

A doctor uses gentle suction to remove the pregnancy from the uterus.

The main points

- A surgical procedure performed at an accredited day surgery by an abortion specialist.
- Available with IV sedation or a local anaesthetic. IV sedation requires fasting and a support person to pick you up. Uber / taxi is not a suitable replacement.
- If you are 12+ weeks gestation you will require a longer stay in the clinic as additional steps may be required before the procedure.

Things to consider

- You need to bring all reports / ultrasounds and a list of medications you are taking.
- You will need to have an ultrasound to accurately confirm gestation

- You have the option of having a contraception inserted post-procedure. You can decide on the day but it's good to consider beforehand, as there will be an added cost.
- Day surgery procedures are not like a visit to the GP. They can take 4-6 hours and you should plan with this in mind. Bring a book or music for entertainment.
- You must not have intercourse or insert anything in your vagina for 1 week after the procedure because this may increase the risk of infection.
- Avoid baths or swimming and strenuous activities for 1 week after the procedure.

Advantages

- Can be performed later in the pregnancy than a medical abortion
- Procedure itself takes only a matter of minutes
- Usually involves only one visit to the clinic
- Usually less bleeding and cramping than with medical abortion
- Medical staff are present throughout the procedure

- Can be performed under IV sedation, which reduces awareness and pain
- Has a very low complication rate and a high success rate
- You can continue to breastfeed
- You have access to free counselling and a nurse led support line before, during and after your procedure.

Disadvantages

While risks are rare, it is still a surgical procedure so it is possible to have any of the following complications:

- Retained pregnancy tissue or clot
- Continuing pregnancy
- Infection
- Uterine perforation
- Anaesthetic complications.

Medical abortion

Terminates a pregnancy using two types of medication taken 24-48 hours apart. Phone based options available, where medication is sent to you.

The main points

- Involves three essential steps: 1) confirming gestation 2) receiving and taking medication in two stages 3) confirming termination was successful.
- Can be provided via telehealth in all states / territories, except ACT and SA, up to 8 weeks gestation at time of consultation with the doctor.

Things to consider

- If you have fallen pregnant with an intrauterine device it will need to be removed beforehand.
- You will need to have an ultrasound to accurately confirm gestation.
- Within four hours of taking the second tablets you may experience heavy bleeding and cramps, usually heavier or more painful than your typical period.

- You will need a follow up consultation two weeks later (either in person or over the phone) to make sure the termination is complete (may involve a further blood test or ultrasound).
- You should avoid baths, swimming and strenuous activities for 1 week after the procedure.

Advantages

- Requires no anaesthetic and is non-invasive (no surgical risks).
- Greater privacy and more options for support at home than a surgical abortion.
- Suitable for patients who live in remote or rural areas.
- Can feel 'more natural' or similar to a heavy period or miscarriage.
- For at least 90% of women results in complete abortion within 4-6 hours, most of the remainder within 24 hours.
- You have access to free counselling and a nurse led support line before, during and after your procedure

Disadvantages

- In rare cases a blood transfusion may be required.
- Uncommon risk of infection but can be treated with antibiotics.
- 1% continuing pregnancy rate, requiring surgical abortion.
- Up to 4% incomplete abortion rate which may require a surgical procedure to complete the process.
- The time to complete the abortion is less predictable than a surgical abortion.
- Cannot be used if you:
 - Are greater than 9 weeks (63 days) gestation.
 - Have certain conditions (bleeding problems or adrenal failure).
 - Taking corticosteroids or blood-thinning medication.
 - Have allergies to the medications used.