

PATIENT INFORMATION



MEDICAL ABORTION

This information is for people who have a medical abortion appointment at Family Planning Victoria (FPV). We would like to ensure your experience is as straightforward as possible. Please ensure that you have read this information before you attend your appointment. If you have any questions, feel free to call us: **(03) 9257 0100**.

What is a medical abortion?

A medical abortion involves taking medication (tablets) to interrupt and expel a pregnancy of up to 9 weeks. The first medication, mifepristone, works by blocking the effect of the hormone that supports the pregnancy. The second medication, misoprostol, is taken 36-48 hours later. This medication causes cramping and bleeding similar to that of a miscarriage.

What are the alternatives?

Surgical abortion: A surgical procedure to terminate a pregnancy whilst under a general anaesthetic.

Why do some people choose medical abortion instead of surgical abortion?

- A feeling of more privacy and control over the abortion process
- General anaesthetic is not necessary
- The experience may feel more natural than a surgical abortion for some people
- They can choose the time the abortion occurs
- A medical abortion may be cheaper

Why do some people choose a surgical abortion instead of a medical abortion?

- Only 1 clinic visit may be required for a surgical abortion. Medical abortions (without complications) require at least 2 telehealth or clinic visits.
- Around 3-5% of those having a medical abortion will need minor surgery to clean the lining of the womb and this will involve extra consultations. Pain and bleeding are usually mild
- The person having the surgical abortion will not see the pregnancy tissue
- The appointment is undertaken at a clinic. The person will not need to find a private place to have the miscarriage.
- An intrauterine contraceptive device (IUD) or contraceptive implant can be inserted at the time of the appointment, immediately after the surgical procedure and whilst still under anaesthetic.

What are the more common experiences when having a medical abortion?

- The first tablet (mifepristone) usually doesn't cause any side effects
- After taking the second tablets (misoprostol):
 - Nausea, vomiting, diarrhoea, dizziness, headaches and fever may occur.
 - Pain usually starts within half an hour and is generally much stronger than period pain.
 - Bleeding usually starts 1-4 hours after taking the second tablets. It is heavier than a period and there may be large clots.
 - The timing of the pain and bleeding can be unpredictable. Occasionally it starts before taking the second medication, but may take up to up to 24 hours to start after the second medication.
 - You might see a piece of pink tissue, which is the pregnancy passing,
 - After 2-6 hours the bleeding usually settles to the level of a normal period
 - The bleeding that follows is usually similar to that of a normal period for another 3-7 days.
 - Unpredictable, irregular or prolonged bleeding can last for up to 5 weeks after a medical abortion
 - In 3-5% of cases (1 in 20: 1 in 33), small pieces of tissue may be left in uterus requiring a minor surgical follow-up procedure to clear the lining of the womb. This procedure is done under anaesthetic.
 - Nausea and/or tiredness usually settle quickly, but breast tenderness can remain for 2 weeks.

Managing bleeding

Use pads to decrease the risk of infection. Do not use tampons or menstrual cups.

Managing pain

- Use pain medicine such as ibuprofen or paracetamol and codeine combinations.
- Rest.
- Massage of the pain, or apply a heat pack against the abdomen.

What are the less common experiences of people having a medication abortion?

- Haemorrhage (very heavy bleeding), requiring a blood transfusion occurs in fewer than 1 in 1000.
- In around 1% (1 in 100) the medical abortion does not work and the person remains pregnant. The tablets can be repeated if the pregnancy is not more than 9 weeks, but a surgical abortion may be required. This can be organised at a public hospital.
- Infection, where the person needs antibiotic treatment, occurs in 1 in 100 instances.
- An ectopic pregnancy (when a pregnancy occurs outside the uterus, usually in the fallopian tubes) that is not diagnosed before medication is taken. This happens to 1 in 7,000. Emergency surgery may be required in this instance.

Who can have a medical abortion?

Most people who have a pregnancy from 5 to 9 weeks can have a medical abortion, however, you should not have the treatment if you:

- have an ectopic pregnancy (a pregnancy that develops outside of the uterus).
- have ever had an allergic reaction to the medications misoprostol or mifepristone.
- cannot stay somewhere within an hour's drive of an emergency medical service from the time when the second tablets are taken until 3 weeks later.
- do not have a support person who can stay with you from the time you take your second dose of tablets until the miscarriage has happened.
- cannot have a blood test, to check your pregnancy hormone level has dropped, 1 week after you have started your tablets.
- cannot be reviewed by the clinic for at least 1 follow-up appointment.

The treatment may not suit you if you:

- are on long term steroid treatment.
- have severe asthma.
- are taking blood thinning medication.



- have a medical condition such as a heart disease, high blood pressure, diabetes or a liver or kidney condition.

What to expect at your telehealth appointment?

You will be given 2 time slots for telephone calls: 1 with a nurse and 1 with a doctor. You will have received a link to download a consent form. You will need to have this document available during your telehealth consultation as you will be asked to give verbal consent to the abortion. Depending on your circumstances the calls might take up to a total of 90 minutes. The doctor and nurse will try to call you as close as possible to your appointment time.

During the consultations you will be:

- asked some questions about your general and sexual health and given detailed information about what to expect and on what to do in the unlikely event that problems occur.

The doctor or nurse will help you plan the best time to take your medications, and will give you advice to help you decide on contraception. If you would like a contraceptive implant or IUD this can be organised at FPV.

Follow up:

- A nurse will call you a few days after you have taken your tablets to check on you.
- You will need a blood test 7 days after you have taken your first tablet to check that your pregnancy hormone level has dropped and that you are no longer pregnant.
- You will need a telehealth consultation with a doctor in around 2 weeks.

How will I feel emotionally after the medical abortion?

Generally, how you feel after a medical abortion will depend on your reasons for having it and how comfortable you feel about your decision. The majority of people feel relieved that they made the decision that was right for them at the time. If you feel you need emotional support please let your FPV doctor or nurse know.

Looking after yourself

After taking the abortion medications:

- avoid alcohol until the miscarriage is complete.
- you may need one or two days off work.
- don't have vaginal sex, swim, have a bath (showering is okay) or do any intense activities or sports for 7 days
- use pads for bleeding until your next period starts or your doctor or nurse tells you it is safe to use tampons or menstrual cups.

Breastfeeding

A small amount of the abortion medication passes into the breast milk. Your FPV doctor or nurse can give you information about how to safely continue with breastfeeding.

How can I prepare for a medical abortion?

From the time you take the second tablets (misoprostol) at home until your heaviest bleeding has settled:

- you will need a responsible adult to stay with you for support, and to help look after any children or adults in your care.
- make sure you have enough pain medication and maxi size sanitary pads, not tampons, for heavy blood flow.

What if I have any concerns after leaving the first clinic appointment?

You will be given detailed information about what to do if you have any concerns or problems

If you have any questions prior to your appointment, please call us: **(03) 9257 0100**

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