



YOUR HEALTH

PATIENT INFORMATION

MEDICATION ABORTION

This information is for patients who have a medication 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 medication abortion?

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

What are the alternatives?

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

Why do some women choose medication abortion instead of surgical abortion?

- A feeling of more privacy and control over the abortion process
- No general anaesthetic is necessary with a medication abortion
- The experience might feel more natural than a surgical abortion
- Cost - a medication abortion can be cheaper

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

- Usually only one clinic visit is needed with a surgical abortion. Medication abortions without complications will need at least 2 clinic visits. Around 3-5% of women having a medication abortion will need minor surgery to clean the lining of the womb and this will involve extra clinic visits
- Pain and bleeding are usually mild
- The pregnancy tissue can't be seen
- Complications are uncommon
- A private place to have the miscarriage is not needed with a surgical abortion
- An intrauterine contraceptive device (IUD) or contraceptive implant can be inserted at the same time – immediately after the surgical procedure whilst still under anaesthetic

What are the more common experiences of women having a medication abortion?

- After taking the second medication abortion tablets at home;
- 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 later. It is heavier than a period and there may be large clots
- The timing of the pain and bleeding is unpredictable. Occasionally it starts before taking the second medication



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but may take up to up to 24 hours to start

- A piece of pink tissue, which is the pregnancy passing, may be seen
- After 2-6 hours the bleeding usually settles to the level of the woman's normal period
- Bleeding is usually similar to the woman's normal period for another 3-7 days
- Unpredictable, irregular or prolonged bleeding can last for up to 4 weeks after a medication abortion
- Some women will have small pieces of tissue left in their uterus and around 3-5% of women (1 in 20 to 1 in 33) undertaking a medication abortion will need a minor procedure to clean the lining of the womb
- Any nausea and/or tiredness usually settle quickly but breast tenderness can remain for 2 weeks

Managing bleeding

Using pads **not tampons** until your next period will help lessen the risk of an infection.

Managing pain

- Using pain medicine such as ibuprofen or Panadeine
- Rest
- Massaging the painful area
- Using a heat pack against the abdomen

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

- Haemorrhage (very heavy bleeding), requiring a blood transfusion occurs in fewer than 1 in 1000 women
- In around 1% (1 in 100 women) the medication abortion does not work and the woman remains pregnant. A surgical abortion is then usually required. This can be organised at a public hospital
- Infection, where the woman needs antibiotic treatment – this happens to 1 in 100 women.
- An ectopic pregnancy (pregnancy outside the uterus, usually in the fallopian tubes) that is not diagnosed before medication is taken - this happens to 1 in 7,000 women. Emergency surgery is always required if this happens.

Who can have a medication abortion?

Most women who have a pregnancy of between 5 and 9 weeks can have a medication 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 during the medication treatment time
- 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 return to the clinic for at least one follow up appointment

The treatment may **not** suit you if you:

- have had an operation on your uterus (this does not include any previous caesarean sections)
- 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 appointment?

- Day 1: An appointment at an FPV clinic for a consultation and to take the first medication (mifepristone)
- Day 2-3: The second medication (misoprostol) is taken at home
- Day 3-4: A phone consultation with a nurse from FPV
- Day 14-21: A follow up appointment at FPV to make sure your abortion is complete. You can arrange to have an IUD or implant inserted during this appointment



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The first clinic appointment

The first clinic appointment will take up to 2 hours. You can eat and drink normally before and after the appointment and you will be able to drive home afterwards.

- A health professional will ask you some questions about your general and sexual health and explain what will happen during your appointment
- You will have a blood test and an ultrasound scan to date the duration of your pregnancy
- Your nurse will talk to you about your long-term contraceptive options
- Around 15% of women will need an injection of a blood product (Anti D) to avoid problems with subsequent pregnancies
- If you decide to have a medication abortion we will ask you to sign a consent form

How will I feel emotionally after the medication abortion?

Generally, how you feel after a medication abortion will depend on the reasons for having it and how comfortable you feel about your decision. The majority of women 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:

- you should avoid alcohol until the miscarriage is complete
- you may need one or two days off work
- you should not have vaginal sex, swim, have a bath (showering is okay) or do any intense activities or sports for seven days
- avoid using tampons until your next period starts

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 medication termination?

From the time you take the misoprostol tablets at home until you have had your miscarriage:

- you will need a responsible adult to stay with you for support and to help you look after any children or adults you care for
- 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 after leaving the clinic

What do I need to bring to the first clinic appointment?

- A blood group card or a copy of a blood group result (if you have either)
- Your Medicare Card or card number
- Your health care or pension cards (if you have either)
- A list of any questions you would like answered (if you have any)
- A form of payment

Please avoid passing urine once you have arrived at the clinic – this helps with the ultrasound

Please arrive 10 minutes before your appointment time.

If you have any questions prior to your appointment, please call us: **9257 0100**
We are located at 901 Whitehorse Road, Box Hill, VIC 3128.

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