

This fact sheet is for women who are experiencing an unplanned pregnancy and want information about abortion. Abortion is when a pregnancy is terminated (ended).

Am I pregnant?

The only way to be sure that you are pregnant is by having a pregnancy test. You can have a test at your GP, a women's health centre or a Family Planning NSW clinic or you can buy a urine test from the pharmacy or supermarket. Finding out if you are pregnant as early as possible gives you more time to think about your options. The length of time you are pregnant is measured from the first day of your last period. If you decide to continue the pregnancy, you should see your GP as soon as possible. If you decide to have an abortion, it is best to have it as early as possible.

Someone to talk to:

Unplanned pregnancies happen to women of all ages and from all backgrounds. It is estimated that 50% of Australian women have an unplanned pregnancy and 1 in 4 women have an abortion. It can be helpful to talk about your options with people who are close to you - your partner, a friend or a family member. You can also talk to a health professional to get more information before you make a decision. There are three options to consider when you are experiencing an unplanned pregnancy:

- continue the pregnancy with a partner or on your own
- continue the pregnancy followed by adoption or foster care
- terminate the pregnancy (abortion).

How is an abortion done?

There are two ways that an abortion can be done. These are surgical abortion or medical abortion.

Surgical abortion

Surgical abortion in NSW is carried out in a clinic by a trained GP or gynaecologist. Before the abortion you will need to have an ultrasound and a blood test. Most surgical abortions are done under sedation, or a light anaesthetic. To have a surgical abortion you will need to be at the clinic for about 4 hours. A surgical abortion is called a suction curette. It takes about 15 minutes to do. It works by using a small plastic tube to gently empty the contents of the uterus. It is safe, simple and low-risk when done under 12 weeks of pregnancy. If it has been more than 12 weeks since your last period the abortion procedure may be more complicated.

You can talk to your doctor or the staff at the clinic about this. It is normal to have some mild cramping and light bleeding after the abortion.

Medical abortion

A medical abortion may be done by a trained GP or gynaecologist. A medical abortion can be provided when you are less than 9 weeks pregnant. If you are more than 9 weeks pregnant you cannot have a medical abortion. You will need to have an ultrasound and blood test before having a medical abortion. A medical abortion happens in two stages:

- you will be given a tablet called mifepristone to take straight away
- you will then be given tablets to take 24-48 hours later at home. These tablets are called misoprostol

After taking both of these tablets you will experience something similar to a miscarriage. Bleeding may be heavy at first and then becomes lighter. Sometimes bleeding can last longer than 2 weeks. Clinical staff will discuss what to expect after the medical abortion. The staff will give you a 24-hour advice number to call for support.

There are risks involved with all medical procedures, including abortion. Your doctor or the staff at the clinic or hospital will discuss these risks with you.

Abortion: the law

Abortion is legal in all states and territories of Australia under certain circumstances and when done by a registered health professional. Each state and territory has different laws.

Do I need a referral?

You do not usually need a referral from a doctor to get an abortion. You can find services through:

- your local Family Planning NSW clinic
- Family Planning NSW Talkline
- Children by Choice

The clinic that you go to will depend on how many weeks pregnant you are. It is important to let the clinic staff know how many weeks pregnant you are when you make your appointment.

How much will it cost?

The cost of an abortion is different for each state and each clinic. If you have a Medicare card, it will cover some of the costs. Medicare does not usually cover the full cost. Ask how much the abortion will cost when you make your appointment.

On the day

Before the abortion a doctor or nurse will talk with you about what is involved in the abortion, what the risks are and what to do to take care of yourself afterwards. You will usually have an ultrasound and a blood test. You will be able to ask questions. If you are having a surgical abortion, the clinic staff will talk to you about not eating or drinking before the appointment and what to bring with you to the appointment. It often helps to have a support person with you. If you are having sedation someone will need to drive you home. If you are having a medical abortion you will experience the abortion at home and should have a support person with you during that time.

Contraception

It's important to think about what contraception you're going to use after the abortion. You can usually start using contraception on the day of the abortion. If you do this you'll be protected against another unplanned pregnancy straight away.

Follow up

You should seek immediate medical help if you have:

- very heavy bleeding
- fever
- pain that isn't improved with simple pain killers

You can seek help from:

- the clinic where you had the abortion done
- your GP
- hospital emergency department

You will need a check-up 2-3 weeks after a medical abortion. You might need to have another blood test and ultrasound. If you have any concerns after having a medical abortion you can call the Marie Stopes International 24 hour advice number on 1300 515 883.

For more information

Family Planning NSW Talkline –
www.fpnsw.org.au/talkline or 1300 658 886

National Relay Service (for deaf people) –
13 36 77

TIS National's interpreting service –
131 450

Family Planning NSW client resource –
Pregnant? Working through your options

Family Planning NSW client factsheet on the law on abortion – <https://www.fpnsw.org.au/factsheets/individuals/abortion/law-abortion-nsw>

Family planning NSW client resource on contraception – <https://www.fpnsw.org.au/health-information/contraception/contraception-options>

Visit your nearest Family Planning NSW clinic –
www.fpnsw.org.au/clinics

Children by Choice –
www.childrenbychoice.org.au

www.fpnsw.org.au | talkline 1300 658 886 | shop

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Family Planning NSW is a not-for-profit organisation funded by the NSW Ministry of Health

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