

Induced Abortion

This page is designed to inform you of the procedure and possible issues that may concern you if you decide to have an induced abortion.

The decision to have an abortion is not an easy one, it is extremely important to have as much information as possible before you choose to go ahead.

What are my options if I am pregnant?

If you find that you are pregnant you may choose one of three options:

You could decide to continue with the pregnancy and keep the baby, continue with the pregnancy and give the baby up for adoption or have an induced abortion.

A spontaneous abortion is otherwise known as a miscarriage.

An induced abortion is the procedure undertaken by a doctor to terminate a pregnancy.

Is abortion legal in WA?

Abortions were legalised in Western Australia in June 1998, however, the operation must be performed by a registered medical practitioner at a clinic or hospital.

It is your right (by law) to be offered counselling both before and after the operation.

By law you must have a written referral from a medical practitioner to have an abortion.

How long do I have before I have to make a decision?

Terminations are available up to 16 weeks but are preferably performed prior to 12 weeks.

In special circumstances abortions may be performed after 12 weeks, though it is important that you feel comfortable in discussing with your doctor or counsellor the physical and psychological implications associated with this type of abortion.

What actually happens in the operation?

About 90% of induced abortions occur at between six and twelve weeks (first trimester) into the pregnancy. The procedure involves the insertion of a tube

into the uterus via the cervix (the opening of the uterus). The foetus and the lining of the uterus are then removed with a gentle sucking action. This method is called vacuum aspiration. The whole procedure generally takes about ten to fifteen minutes.

Will I be awake?

Abortions are performed either under general anaesthetic or using an anaesthetic technique called 'twilight sleep', which means that you will sleep through the entire operation. You will need to rest afterwards regardless of the type of anaesthetic.

Are there any risks involved in the operation?

There are risks involved in any operation, however "the overall risk of experiencing a complication during or soon after an abortion has been estimated at nine women in 1 000" (Health Department of WA, 'A Summary of Medical Risk of Induced Abortion and of Carrying a Pregnancy to Term')

Some other risks of termination of pregnancy are:

Pelvic infection is the most common complication but the incidence of this has been minimised with the introduction of routine administration of antibiotics in WA centres.

Another common complication is excessive bleeding, though the frequency of this risk has decreased significantly over the past few decades and is now regarded as being quite minor.

Perforation of the uterus is uncommon.

If you experience prolonged heavy bleeding, fever or pain after the operation, seek medical advice as this may be a cause for concern.

How will I feel after the operation?

Reactions vary from person to person, this means that it is perfectly normal for you to feel relieved, sad, guilty, confident, 'back to normal' or depressed. In situations where the pregnancy is terminated due to foetal abnormality or if you felt pressured into making the decision to have an abortion, it is more likely that you will experience more serious emotional problems.

In addition there may be physical, religious and ethical issues that need to be considered when making this decision. As such, you may find that you need to have more than one counselling session before (and after) you make a decision. This counselling is designed to enable you to voice any fears or misgivings you may have and possibly prevent any serious emotional consequences.

What will it cost?

If you are an Australian resident, Medicare will pay a percentage of the price, but costs vary.

Where can I go?

To your doctor or women's health centre for a referral. See list at bottom of page.

What about after the abortion?

Rest

It is important that you rest for at least a day after an abortion. It is important that you bring someone to drive you home as you will have had an anaesthetic.

Cramps

You may experience cramps for 12 - 24 hours after the operation. These cramps are normal and can be relieved by taking two Panadol / Naprogesic / Naprosyn (or an equivalent medication) every four hours.

Bleeding

Your bleeding will vary after the abortion but can be likened to heavy menstrual flow which should taper off gradually over 10 - 14 days.

Check-up

It is important to see your doctor two weeks after the operation for a check-up.

Infection

To minimise the possibility of infection:

Take showers not baths for two weeks after the abortion, and don't go swimming.

Use pads, not tampons, until the first menstrual period after the operation. This could take six weeks.

Don't have intercourse for two weeks after the abortion.

Can I get pregnant after an abortion?

Yes, you will remain fertile after an abortion and as such, you should consider contraceptive options prior to the termination. The contraceptive pill is usually dispensed along with antibiotics after the abortion. Studies also show that having an abortion will not increase the risk of ectopic pregnancy, spontaneous abortion, premature labour or low birth weight in any subsequent pregnancies.

Who can I talk to?

There are a number of organisations able to provide pregnancy counselling:

Women's Health Care House

100 Aberdeen St
Northbridge 6003
ph: (08) 9227 8122

FPWA (sexual health specialists)

70 Roe St
Northbridge 6003
ph: (08) 9227 6177
toll free: 1800 198 205
www.fpwa-health.org.au

The Roe Street Centre for Human Relationships

Counselling service run by FPWA
ph. (08) 9228 3693

Quarry Health Centre

Low cost counselling for under 25s - individuals, couples and families.
7 Quarry St
Fremantle
ph: (08) 9430 4544

Contact your local doctor.