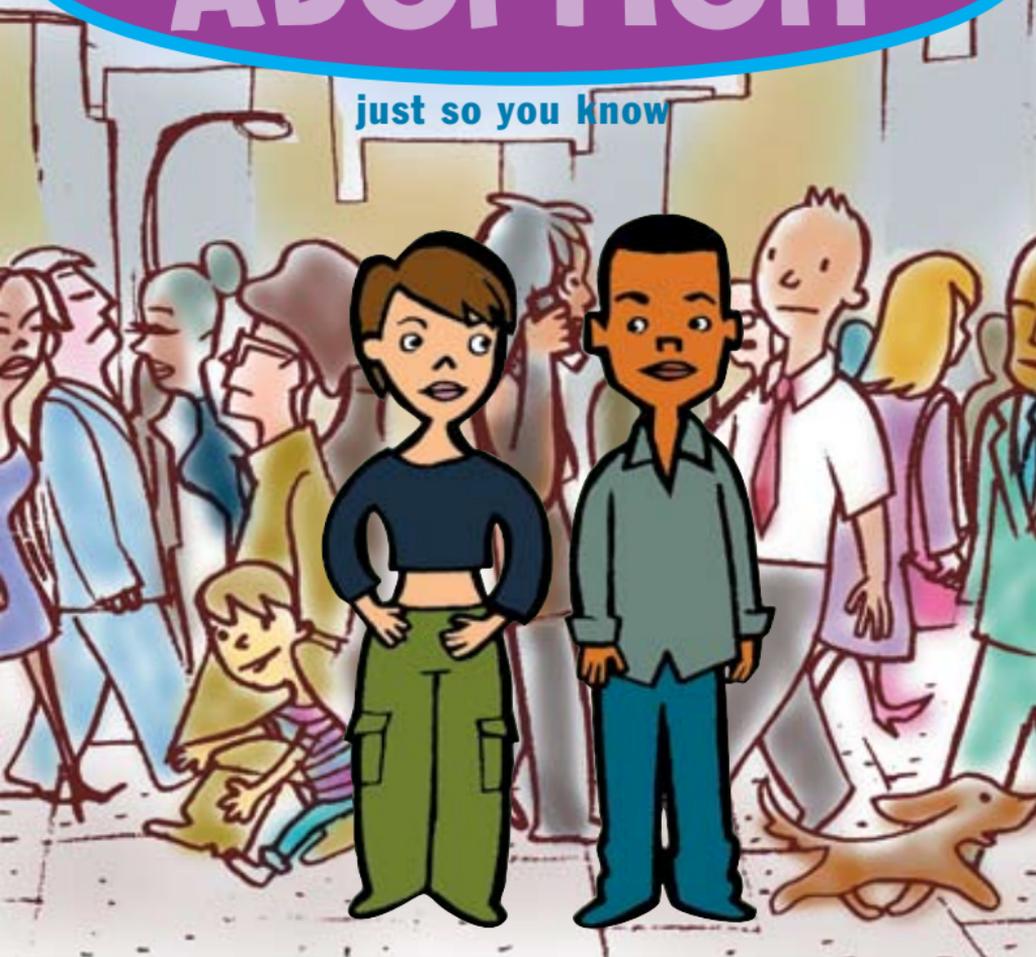


# Abortion

just so you know



**Abortion can arouse strong feelings. This booklet aims to:**

- help you understand more about abortion
- give you information about abortion that could help you, or someone you know, make a choice about what to do when facing an **unplanned pregnancy**.

Women from all cultures and backgrounds have abortions.

In England and Wales, about one in five of all known pregnancies are terminated – about 190,000 a year. Women in their 20s account for about half, teenagers about a fifth. Over half of all pregnancies in under 16s end in abortion.

About 90 per cent of abortions take place very early in pregnancy – in the first 12 weeks (ie within eight weeks of missing a period).

## WHAT IS ABORTION?

An abortion is when a pregnancy is ended, or terminated.

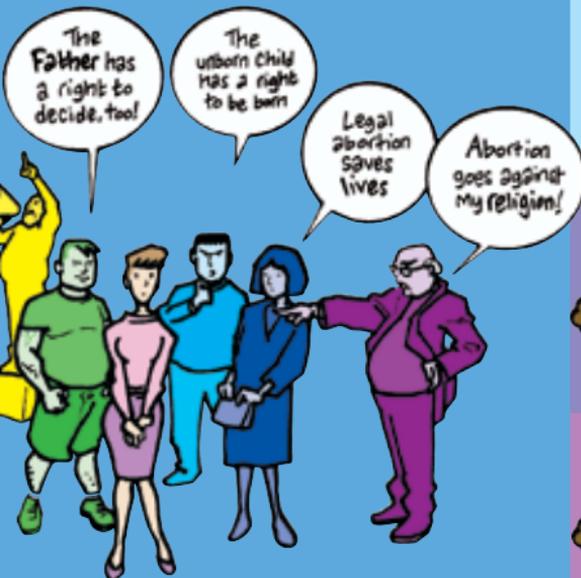
Sometimes a fertilised egg or embryo is lost naturally. This is known as a **spontaneous abortion** or **miscarriage**, and happens in about **one in four** known pregnancies. Many more occur within the first weeks of pregnancy, before a period is even missed.

An **induced** abortion (usually just called abortion or termination) happens when a fertilised egg or embryo is removed from the uterus (womb), either by taking pills to expel the pregnancy, or by surgery.



Many people find it difficult to talk openly with family and friends about abortion because it can arouse strong feelings. Many people have strong views about unplanned pregnancy. Some say it's the woman's right to choose what to do. Not everyone agrees...

## ABORTION – RIGHT OR WRONG?



Life begins when a sperm fertilises an egg!

Life begins when a baby can survive on its own outside its mother's womb!

The fertilised egg possesses a soul that has a right to life!

The safety and life of the woman is most important until the fetus can live independently.

A pregnant woman is responsible for the life that she is carrying!

Even when she's been raped?!

Around the world, individual attitudes and laws on abortions are very different...



Is  
abortion  
legal?



## ABORTION AND THE LAW

**Abortion is legal in the UK up to the 24th week of pregnancy.**

Legal abortion is safer and easier the earlier it is done in pregnancy. Most abortions are carried out before 13 weeks of pregnancy.

Two doctors will need to agree that it is necessary for the woman's mental or physical health for her to have an abortion.

It can be very difficult to get an abortion in Northern Ireland.

Abortions must be performed in a **National Health Service (NHS)** hospital or in a clinic approved by the Department of Health, such as those run by **bpas** and **Marie Stopes International**.

**Abortion after 24 weeks of pregnancy is not common. It can only take place if the woman's life is in danger or if there is a risk that the child would be born with a serious disability.**



Worldwide about **20 million unsafe abortions are carried out every year** and about **65,000 women a year die because of unsafe abortions.**

In countries where abortion is legal, some individuals and groups violently oppose it.

Making abortion illegal does not stop women from seeking an abortion.

In countries where abortion is illegal unless it is to save

the woman's life, many women risk permanent injury and death through unsafe abortion practices.

**That's why, in the UK, where abortion is legal, most people want it to stay that way.**

## MONEY AND HEALTH

Are abortions free?



**Abortion is free if you are referred by the NHS.** In some areas, over 90 per cent of all abortions are funded by the NHS. In other areas, very few are funded by the NHS. There is a wide variation because each health authority has to decide how much money to put into local abortion services.

**Abortion (under 12 weeks) at a clinic run by a charity, such as bpas or Marie Stopes International, will cost around £500. The cost at a privately-run clinic can be higher.**

Is abortion safe?



For most women an abortion is safer than having a baby. However, abortion is not entirely free from risk. Problems at the time of abortion are not very common but are less likely when the abortion is carried out early in pregnancy and when it is performed by an experienced doctor.

Most women have no problems after an abortion. Of those who do, **infection** is the most common problem. Taking antibiotics (a type of medicine) at the time of the abortion helps to reduce this risk.

Will an abortion stop me from having a baby in the future?



Having an abortion will **not** affect a woman's chances of having a baby in the future if there are no problems with the abortion.



## WHY WOMEN CONSIDER HAVING ABORTIONS

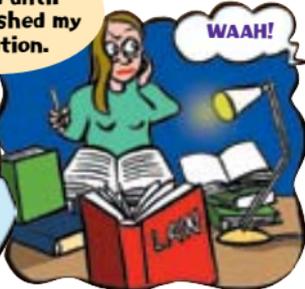
**MANY** pregnancies happen without planning. When a woman finds out she is pregnant and it is unplanned, she may decide to keep the baby, have it adopted or have an abortion.

Some women know immediately what they want to do. For others, it can be a difficult decision. Faced with an unplanned pregnancy, some women find that their views on abortion change. Clear information, advice and support can help a woman decide what to do.

But **NO** woman becomes pregnant in order to have an abortion!



I don't want a child until I've finished my education.



We **BOTH** want a baby, but in the future.



Becoming a parent will change my life. I'm not ready for it.

My boyfriend has left me and I don't think I can cope by myself.

I think I am too young to have a baby.



I'm not in a relationship.

I can't afford children yet.

It will be hard to keep my job.

Having a child would stop me from having a life of my own.

Leaving so soon?

I'm sorry! The childcare's ill!

YOU can stay in...

I'm off to the pub!

People say they'll support me, but how can I be sure?



We don't want to be parents.



We want children some day, but we're not ready for the responsibility yet.



I don't want anyone to know that I've had sex or that I'm pregnant.



We have all the children we want!



It will be hard for me to care for my other children.

Many women who choose abortion have several of these reasons. Other reasons may be that a woman's husband, partner, or parent wants her to have an abortion; she or the fetus has a health problem; or she has been raped.

What about ME?



This may be a difficult time for men, too. Some will want to share in the decision; others won't want to be involved at all. Many will support their girlfriend's or wife's decision, even if it conflicts with their own feelings. Even where there is no relationship, a man may feel he has a right to be informed.

However, it is up to the woman to decide whether or not to involve the man in her choice. He has no legal right to be informed, or to be involved in her decision.

## WHAT ARE THE SIGNS OF PREGNANCY?

Signs of pregnancy usually appear one to two weeks after conception. They vary from woman to woman, but may include:

- missing a period
- **a shorter, lighter period than usual**
- a swelling or tenderness in the breasts
- **frequent urination (peeing a lot)**
- feeling tired
- **nausea or vomiting – often called morning sickness, though not always in the morning**
- feeling bloated or period-like cramps
- **appetite changes (going off certain foods)**
- mood changes.



## PREGNANCY TESTING

A woman who thinks she is pregnant, or has missed a period, will need to get a **pregnancy test** as soon as possible.

She can have a **free** test at:

a young people's service

most NHS walk-in centres (England only)

some general practices

many contraception clinics

some sexual health or genitourinary medicine (GUM) clinics.

She can **pay** to have a test at a:

bpas clinic

Marie Stopes clinic.

Many pharmacies offer pregnancy testing and sell home pregnancy tests. These cost between £5–15. They are very reliable, but if a woman uses a home kit, she should still see a doctor.

Some women may try to ignore the pregnancy in the hope that it'll go away! But it won't...



## SEEKING ADVICE – AND MAKING A DECISION

Once pregnancy has been confirmed, a woman will need to discuss her choices as soon as possible. If she wants to keep her options open, it is important to see someone who will be sympathetic.



She can talk to her own GP or a doctor or nurse at one of the clinics listed on page 8 for specific information and counselling.

In Northern Ireland, women facing an unplanned pregnancy can contact **fpa**

for counselling, information and advice. See page 16.



All the organisations listed on page 16 are important sources of help, and have useful booklets and websites. Some organisations offer pregnancy tests and counselling but not information

on abortion.

Only a few help women who are considering placing their baby for adoption.



Some women might want people to tell them what to do – it sometimes seems easier than having to make their own decision. Talking to people they trust can help, but in the end it is the pregnant woman herself who has to decide.



But whatever decision is made, it's important to take action early on – to begin maternity care if the pregnancy is to continue, or to have an abortion as soon as possible.



## WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

**Once a woman has decided she wants to end her pregnancy, she will need to see a doctor. If she doesn't want to go to her GP, or the doctor who confirmed the pregnancy, one of the organisations listed on page 16 can give advice and answer any questions.**

### **A doctor or nurse will:**

- work out how many weeks pregnant she is
- talk through the decision and explore her feelings about it
- decide if she is eligible for an abortion
- explain what an abortion involves
- make sure she understands any risks
- consider her general health
- make a note of any regular medication taken (which may cause reactions to anaesthetics).



**Will the doctor tell anyone?**

**A woman doesn't need to tell her partner, or get his agreement, if she wants to have an abortion.**

A girl under 16 can have an abortion without telling her parents if both doctors believe that she fully understands what is involved. However, the doctor or clinic may strongly suggest that she does involve a parent, carer or another supportive adult, unless there are exceptional circumstances. The only time a doctor may have to pass on information is when a woman's safety, or the safety of somebody else, is at risk.



**If the doctor agrees that a woman is eligible for an abortion, they will refer her to an NHS abortion service.**

**Most NHS doctors are sympathetic to women considering abortion, but some may be unwilling to agree to an abortion because they object to it on religious or moral grounds.**

**Doctors who object to abortion can refuse to help but must refer women to another doctor or nurse who will help. This can cause delays.**

**If women need further advice or help they can contact one of the organisations listed on page 16.**

## WHAT HAPPENS DURING AN EARLY MEDICAL ABORTION?

**EARLY MEDICAL ABORTION –**  
otherwise called the abortion pill

**WHEN** Up to nine weeks

**WHERE** Two visits to a clinic, 1–3 days apart. Usual activities can be carried out in between appointments. A check-up should be offered 7–14 days after the abortion.

**HOW IT WORKS** Pills are taken, causing the uterus lining to break down and bleed. At the second visit a tablet or vaginal pessary is given, which softens and opens the cervix (the opening to the uterus). The pregnancy is lost with the bleeding just like a miscarriage – normally 4–6 hours after the second tablet or pessary.

**DOES IT HURT?** There will be some pain, like period pain – painkillers can be taken. There will be some bleeding, which can be irregular and last a while.

### WHEN WILL IT HAPPEN?

Appointments at private clinics or at clinics run by charities are usually available within a few days. Sometimes the consultation and the abortion can be arranged on the same day for women who are under 14 weeks pregnant. Abortions funded by the NHS may be more difficult to arrange, depending on availability of local services.



**SURGICAL ABORTION –**  
also known as vacuum aspiration

**WHEN** Up to 15 weeks

**WHERE** One visit to a clinic. Most women can go home the same day. Women having a local anaesthetic may only need to stay 1–2 hours.

**HOW IT WORKS** A tube or pump removes the pregnancy by suction. No cutting is required. The procedure usually takes about 10 minutes.

**DOES IT HURT?** With a local anaesthetic, which numbs the cervix, there will be some cramps, like period pain. If the woman has a general anaesthetic (goes to sleep) she won't feel anything. After the abortion there may be some pain, like period pain, and bleeding, like a period. This can last for up to 14 days.



### AT THE CLINIC

Most women prefer to go to the clinic with someone who can support them – their partner, a friend or relative.

## WHAT HAPPENS DURING A LATER ABORTION?

### MEDICAL ABORTION

**WHEN** From 9–20 weeks

**WHERE** May need one night in a clinic or hospital, though usually the abortion is complete in a day.

**HOW IT WORKS** This is similar to an early medical abortion, but the abortion takes longer to complete and more drugs are used.

**DOES IT HURT?** There may be some strong cramping pains, but painkillers can help with these. Afterwards there may be some pain, like period pain, and bleeding for about a week, or possibly longer.

**Before going home**, the clinic will check there is no abnormal bleeding or discomfort. Bleeding varies from woman to woman, but should be no worse than a very heavy period. Sanitary towels (not tampons) should be used until the bleeding has stopped.

### DILATATION & EVACUATION (D&E)

**WHEN** After 15 weeks

**WHERE** Usually one day at a clinic or hospital but possibly an overnight stay.

**HOW IT WORKS** The cervix is gently stretched to allow narrow forceps to remove the pregnancy. Suction might also be used. No cutting is required.

**DOES IT HURT?** This is carried out under general anaesthetic. There may be some pain afterwards and bleeding for up to 14 days.

### ABORTIONS AFTER 21 WEEKS

Whichever abortion method is used, drugs are used to ensure the fetus is not alive when the abortion is done.

The clinic will explain what to expect and how to take care.

It's important to return for any follow-up appointment to make sure the abortion is complete and there are no problems. This appointment can be at the hospital or clinic where the abortion took place, or with the GP, or at a contraception or sexual health clinic.

## WHAT HAPPENS AFTER AN ABORTION?

After an early abortion a woman can usually **return to work, school or college** the next day. She should always follow the doctor's advice. It takes time to adjust emotionally as well as physically, and medication or anaesthetics can cause disorientation for a while. Recovery takes longer after later abortions or after a general anaesthetic.



### FEELINGS AFTER THE ABORTION

**No woman forgets that she has had an abortion, but most women who choose an abortion do not regret it.**

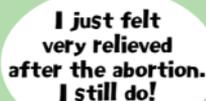
A woman can experience many feelings after an abortion.

She may feel relieved or feel sad or may have mixed feelings. These are natural reactions.

Only a few women have any long-term psychological problems and those women who do often had similar problems before pregnancy. It is always important for a woman to seek help and support if she is feeling upset about having had an abortion.

She can talk to:

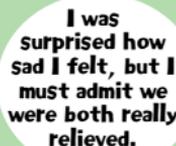
- her GP or practice nurse
- a doctor or nurse at a contraception or sexual health clinic
- fpa.



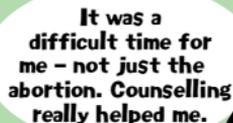
I just felt very relieved after the abortion. I still do!



Sometimes I wonder what having a baby would have been like. But, no, I don't regret it.



I was surprised how sad I felt, but I must admit we were both really relieved.



It was a difficult time for me - not just the abortion. Counselling really helped me.

### HAVING SEX AGAIN

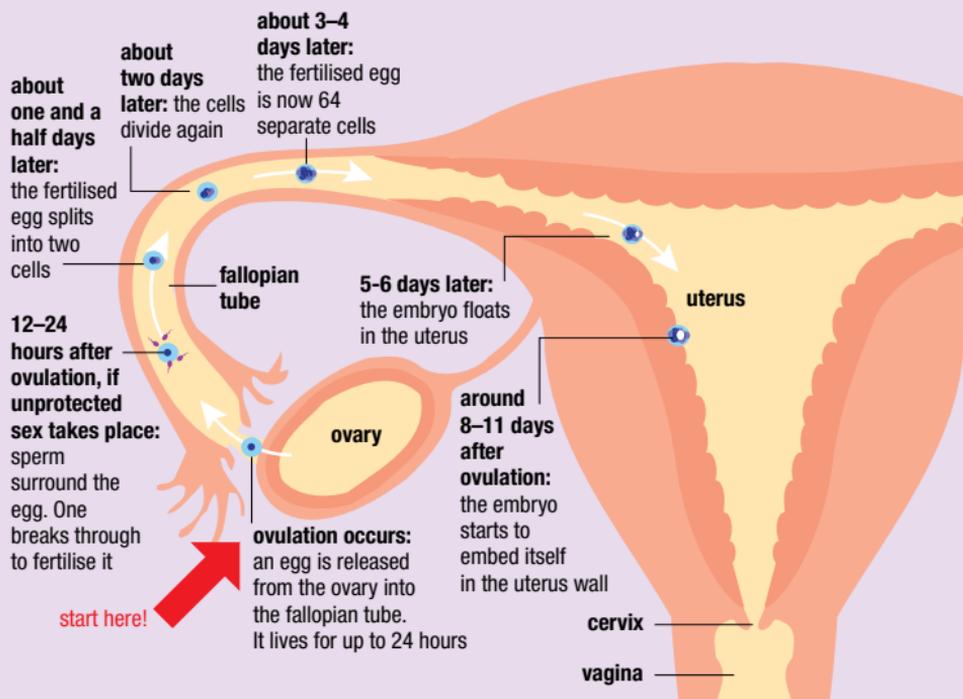
**Having sex may be the last thing on her mind, but a woman can become pregnant again within two weeks of having an abortion.**

It is advisable to wait for two weeks after the abortion before having sex – this helps to reduce the risk of infection.

If a woman does not want to become pregnant she should **use contraception** immediately after the abortion.

## PROTECTING YOURSELF AGAINST UNPLANNED PREGNANCY

After sex, sperm can remain fertile for up to seven days. Once an egg has been fertilised, it takes around 8–11 days to implant itself in the uterus.



Unplanned pregnancies happen because people have sex without using contraception, or they use it incorrectly, or it fails.

The best way to help protect yourself from unplanned pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections is to use a condom.

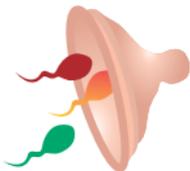
There are many methods of contraception and they work in different ways, but mainly by:

- stopping the ovaries from releasing an egg

or

- preventing the sperm and egg from meeting.

## CHOOSING CONTRACEPTION



If **you** are having sex and don't want to become pregnant – or get someone pregnant – make sure that the method of contraception you're using is right for you. If you don't like the method you're using, or don't think it's reliable, get advice about changing it – don't just stop using it!

Get all the information you need to make your choice. **You can be any age to get free advice and help about contraception from a doctor or contraception clinic.** All services are confidential. **fpa** (see page 16) has details of all clinics in the UK and a useful booklet for young people, **Is Everybody Doing It? Your Guide To Contraception**, or can just talk to you about contraception.

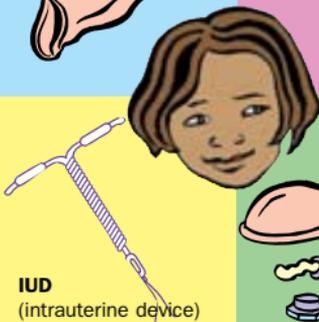
Condoms are free from contraception and sexual health clinics, and some GPs. They can be easily bought without needing to see a doctor.



condom



pill



diaphragm with spermicide

IUD  
(intrauterine device)



If you're not having sex, you should still plan ahead for when you will be – it only takes one sperm to fertilise an egg. It may be awkward to admit that you're planning ahead for sex, but it's the best way to avoid unplanned pregnancy.

## Emergency contraception

If you've had sex without using contraception, or think your contraception might have failed, there are two types of emergency contraception you can use.



The emergency pill must be taken **up to three days** after unprotected sex. It is more effective the earlier it is taken after sex.

An **IUD** (Intrauterine device) must be fitted **within five days** after sex or ovulation (release of an egg).

You can get emergency contraception free from:

- a doctor or nurse
- a contraception clinic
- a young people's clinic or Brook clinic
- some GUM clinics
- sexual health clinics
- walk-in centres
- minor injuries units
- some hospital accident and emergency departments (phone first).

You can buy the emergency pill from most pharmacies if you are 16 years old or over.

## INFORMATION AND ADVICE

You can get information on contraception and abortion and details of local contraception and young people's clinics from:

## fpa helplines



### ENGLAND

0845 122 8690

Monday–Friday

9am–6pm

### NORTHERN IRELAND

0845 122 8687

Monday–Thursday

9am–5pm;

Friday 9am–4.30pm

[www.fpa.org.uk](http://www.fpa.org.uk)

### BROOK

Tel: 0800 0185023

[www.brook.org.uk](http://www.brook.org.uk)

sexual health advice and services for young people under 25

### USEFUL WEBSITE FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

Education for Choice [www.efc.org.uk](http://www.efc.org.uk)

Helps young people make and act on informed decisions about pregnancy and abortion.



For information and counselling on abortion, you may also want to contact:

your local contraception clinic

a **GP** (if you think your own GP may not be sympathetic you can go to another doctor)

a genitourinary medicine (**GUM**) sexual health clinic.

Look in the phone book under **GUM**

a **private clinic** – you can make a confidential appointment with specialist staff at a consultation centre

### bpas

Tel: 08457 30 40 30

[www.bpas.org](http://www.bpas.org)

### Marie Stopes International

Tel: 0845 300 8090

[www.mariestopes.org.uk](http://www.mariestopes.org.uk)



50 Featherstone Street,  
London EC1Y 8QU

Tel: 020 7608 5240

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**fpa** is a member of **Voice for Choice**, a coalition which campaigns for women to be able to make their own choices about abortion. The coalition campaigns for:

- abortion on request within the existing legal time limit
- suitably trained nurses to be able to carry out abortions
- the removal of restrictions on where abortions can take place, as long as the locations are safe
- the law on abortion in Northern Ireland to be brought in line with the rest of the UK.