



What is abortion?

Abortion is a way to end pregnancy. Sometimes, an embryo or fetus stops developing and the body expels it. This is called *spontaneous* abortion or "miscarriage." A woman can also choose to end a pregnancy. This is called *induced* abortion. There are three ways it can be done—with medicine, vacuum aspiration, or surgery.

Who chooses abortion?

The chances are high that a woman will have more than one unplanned pregnancy in the course of her lifetime. Nearly half of all U.S. women will have an abortion by the time they are 45 years old. More than six million women in the U.S. become pregnant every year. Half of those pregnancies are unintended. And 1.31 million end in abortion.

The most common reasons a woman chooses abortion are:

- She is not ready to become a parent.
- She cannot afford a baby.
- She doesn't want to be a single parent.
- She doesn't want anyone to know she has had sex or is pregnant.
- She is too young or immature to have a child.
- She has all the children she wants.
- Her husband, partner, or parent wants her to have an abortion.
- She or the fetus has a health problem.
- She was a survivor of rape or incest.

Can anyone help me decide if abortion is right for me?

Most women look to their husbands, partners, families, health care providers, clergy, or someone else they trust for support as they make their decision. Specially trained counselors at women's health clinics can talk to you in private. You may bring someone with you. You will discuss your options—adoption, parenting, and abortion. Your counselor will try to make sure that no one is pressuring you to have an abortion.

Does my partner or a parent need to know?

Many women go to the clinic with their partners. However, you don't have to tell your partner. Either way, the clinic ensures complete privacy. If there are complications during the procedure, however, parents of minors may be notified.

More than half of the teenagers who choose abortion talk about it with at least one parent. But telling a parent is only required in states with mandatory parental involvement laws. Such laws force a woman under 18 to tell a parent or get permission before having an abortion. In most of these states, if she can't talk with her parents—or *chooses not to*—she can appear before a judge. The judge will consider whether she's mature enough to decide on her own. If not, the judge will decide whether an abortion is in her best interests.

When are abortions performed?

Most abortions—nearly 90 percent—are provided in the first trimester—the first three months of pregnancy. **Fewer than 11 percent** take place in the second trimester. Abortion is very rare and only done for serious health reasons after 24 weeks.

The earlier the better. Try to arrange an abortion as soon as you have made up your mind. Earlier abortions are easier and safer than abortions later in pregnancy. They also cost less.

Does getting an abortion hurt?

Some kind of painkiller is used in all abortions. Most women feel cramps. You may have cramps during and after a vacuum aspiration. You will feel strong cramps with medication abortion—which is done with medicine instead of instruments.



Can an embryo or fetus feel pain?

We know for sure that the embryo or fetus cannot perceive pain in the nearly 99 percent of all abortions that occur before the 20th week of pregnancy. It is even possible that a fetus is unable to perceive pain at any time during pregnancy. If, however, the ability to feel pain does develop before birth and consciousness, it is likely to happen only after the 28th week of pregnancy, when abortion is performed only for urgent medical reasons.

How will I feel after an abortion?

Most women feel relief. Some women feel anger, regret, guilt, or sadness for a little while. Sudden hormonal changes may intensify these feelings.

Some people who oppose women's right to make their own decisions claim that abortion often causes long-lasting emotional problems, or "post-abortion syndrome." There is no scientific proof for these claims.

What about emotional problems after abortion?

Serious, long-term emotional problems after abortion are extremely rare and less common than they are after childbirth. Such problems are more likely if:

- The pregnancy was wanted but the health of the fetus or the woman was in danger.
- Having an abortion is related to serious problems in a relationship or other disturbing life events.
- A woman is depressed or already has emotional problems.

If you need to talk with someone after an abortion, abortion providers can offer follow-up counseling or refer you to a counselor.

Warning: Hundreds of so-called "crisis pregnancy centers" scare women about abortion. They lie about the medical and emotional effects of abortion. Most often, they give pregnancy tests without professional medical supervision. And they discourage sexually active women from using the most common and effective methods of birth control.

Other frequently asked questions

Does abortion cause breast cancer?

No.

Will an early abortion affect my ability to have a child in the future?

No. Safe, uncomplicated, legal abortion should not affect fertility.

Does an early abortion make miscarriage more likely in the future?

No.

Does an early abortion make ectopic, or tubal, pregnancy more likely in the future?

No. Not unless a serious infection occurs. Infection occurs in only one out of 300 first-trimester abortions and only rarely does it affect future pregnancies.

Does an early abortion cause premature birth or low infant birth weight in future pregnancies?

No.

Does an early abortion cause birth defects in future pregnancies?

No.

Does an early abortion increase the chance of infant death in the future?

No.

Does having several abortions affect future pregnancies?

No. Abortions do not make it harder to carry a pregnancy to term.