



## **Medical Abortion Aftercare**

Support for your recovery  
at home

---

### **Contents**

---

If you need to talk	2
Ectopic pregnancy awareness	3
What to expect	5
Pain relief	17
Abortion aftercare	18
Pregnancy symptoms and testing	22
Sexually transmitted infection (STI) testing	24
Using contraception	25

---

## About this booklet

**This booklet will give you aftercare information and advice. It is important that you read this information and take it home with you. It is organised into 8 sections. More aftercare and contraception information is available on the Marie Stopes UK website: [mariestopes.org.uk](https://www.mariestopes.org.uk)**

If you need to speak to an aftercare nurse call **0345 122 1441**.

If dialling from outside of the UK call **+44 1454 45 7553**.

Once you have given us your PIN and password over the phone our team of aftercare nurses can access your medical history. The information that you give to us on the phone call is documented. This is to make sure that any member of our aftercare team can support you if you call us another time.

## If you need to talk

It is normal to feel a range of different emotions after an abortion. You might feel relieved or sad, or maybe a mixture of feelings. Our counsellors are here for you if you need to talk. We can arrange post-abortion counselling for you. This can be face-to-face or over the phone.

To book a counselling appointment call our 24-hour advice line on **0345 300 8090**.

## Ectopic pregnancy awareness

Please watch out for these signs and symptoms of ectopic pregnancy:

- Vaginal bleeding or a brown watery discharge
- Pain in the tip of your shoulder
- Abdominal pain low down on one side
- Discomfort when urinating or pooing

These symptoms are not always a sign of a serious problem, but if you experience any of these symptoms, you need to call our aftercare line.

To call our aftercare line you need to phone **0345 122 1441**.

## **Ectopic pregnancy warning signs**

If you have any combination of the following symptoms, seek medical advice immediately:

- A sharp, sudden, and intense pain in your abdomen (stomach pain)
- Feeling very dizzy or fainting
- Feeling sick
- Looking very pale

Call 999 or go to your closest A&E department.

## **What to expect during treatment**

### **After your first tablet**

You will now have taken the first of the medical abortion tablets (mifepristone) at the clinic.

Most people can continue their daily routine as normal after taking mifepristone. You may experience some bleeding and pain similar to starting your period.

If you are sick within 1 hour of taking the first pill, you will need to take another mifepristone tablet for it to be effective. Please let us know as soon as possible if you have been sick within 1 hour after taking the tablet by calling **0345 122 1441**.

If you think you have miscarried before taking the second set of abortion tablets (misoprostol) please let us know. It's important that you still attend your second appointment if you are coming back to the clinic to take the second tablets there.

If you are taking the second tablets (misoprostol) at home, and believe you have miscarried before taking it, please call our aftercare line on **0345 122 1441**.

Once the first tablet has been taken, if you change your mind and decide to continue with the pregnancy we can't guarantee a healthy pregnancy. We would advise you to see your GP as soon as possible.

## **Taking the second tablets in the clinic**

If you have chosen to take the second tablets (misoprostol) at the clinic, the nurse will guide you through the next steps.

### **Advice for travelling home**

If you have taken both sets of medical abortion tablets in the clinic, please be aware of the advice below:

- Please go straight home. You may have bleeding, cramps, and possible side effects during your journey.
- You should wear a sanitary pad suitable for a heavy flow (not tampons or menstrual cup).

- Do not use public transport (bus, train, tube / metro, or tram) and do not drive yourself home. We strongly recommend that someone travels with you.
- There is increased risk of deep vein thrombosis (DVT – blood clots in the legs) from a period of sitting still. We advise against travelling a long way on the day of treatment. If you are travelling by plane, have regular walks during the flight.
- If you have any leg pain, leg swelling, chest pain, breathlessness, dizziness or fainting either during or soon after the flight, seek emergency medical attention.

## Taking the second tablets at home

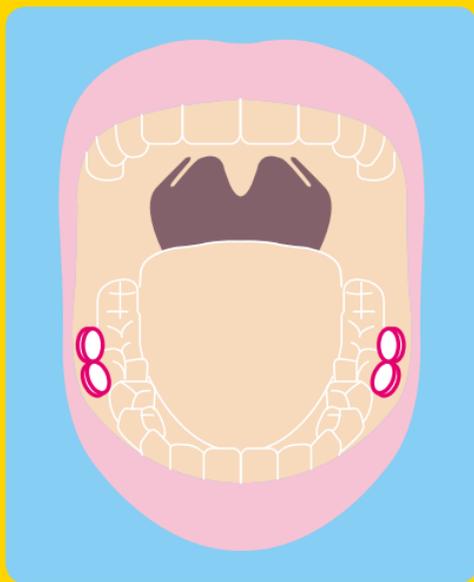
We recommend taking some pain relief tablets 10 minutes before taking misoprostol. See page 17 for advice on pain relief.

You can take misoprostol between 24 - 48 hours after you have taken the first tablet (mifepristone) at the clinic. If more than 72 hours pass and you have not taken the misoprostol tablets, please ring our 24-hour aftercare line on **0345 122 1441** and speak to one of our nurses. You may need to come back to the clinic to repeat the treatment.

There are two ways to take misoprostol at home. The first is by dissolving the tablets in your mouth between your cheek and gums.

### **Dissolving the tablets in your mouth:**

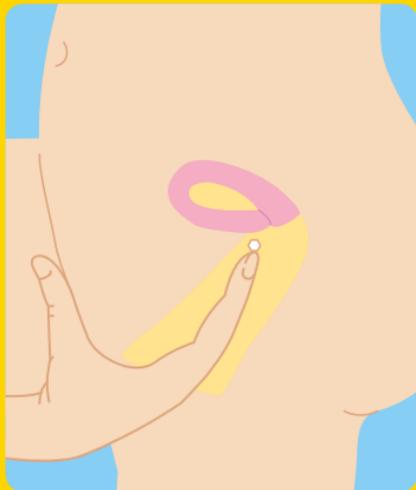
1. Put 2 misoprostol tablets on each side of your mouth between your cheek and gums.
2. Keep them in your mouth for 30 minutes for them to dissolve.
3. After 30 minutes, you can swallow any undissolved tablets with water. The tablets may leave an unpleasant taste in your mouth.



The second is by inserting the tablets into your vagina. You may have fewer side effects by taking the tablets in this way.

### **Dissolving the tablets in your vagina:**

1. Empty your bladder.
2. Wash your hands.
3. Using your finger, push the misoprostol tablets up into the vagina one at a time. Insert them as far as you can.
4. Sit or lie down for up to 10 minutes after you have inserted all of the misoprostol tablets.



If the tablets come out before you start to bleed, you can reinsert them using the method above, or call our aftercare line for instructions.

The tablets might come out of the vagina when you start to bleed. If the tablets come out at this point, don't worry. In most cases, enough medication will have been absorbed.

## **Bleeding and cramps – passing the pregnancy**

Strong cramping and bleeding are to be expected and vary for each person. The abortion will usually start within 2 – 5 hours, but there is a chance it could start sooner. Everybody is different, but the abortion is usually completed within 1 – 2 days.

Very occasionally, it can take up to 2 weeks to fully pass all the pregnancy tissue.

You may experience strong cramping and bleeding which can last a few hours. During this time, it would be expected for you to pass the pregnancy tissue and blood clots. The clots may range in size from small (the size of a pound coin) to quite large (the size of a lemon). This is a normal part of the abortion process.

You may like to have a private toilet nearby. Often the pregnancy is passed in the toilet within 4 - 5 hours after taking the second set of tablets.

Once the pregnancy has been passed, your bleeding will usually reduce and become like a heavy period. It may be quite heavy for a day or two as your womb returns to its normal size.

It is normal to have some bleeding or spotting for up to 4 weeks after your medical abortion. This bleeding may come and go and be quite irregular. If you ever feel worried, call us to speak to an aftercare nurse.

If you have had no bleeding at all within 48 hours of taking the second set of medical abortion tablets, please call our 24-hour aftercare line on **0345 122 1441**.

## Pain relief

You can take pain relief tablets, such as paracetamol and ibuprofen, at home. These will not interfere with the abortion medication. Some people should avoid using ibuprofen, and others should use it with caution. **Do not take pain relief that contains aspirin as it can increase bleeding.**

You can apply a heat pad or (warm) hot water bottle wrapped in a towel or blanket to your lower abdomen. This can ease the pain from cramps and make you feel more comfortable. Wearing comfy, loose clothing and relaxing at home can also reduce pain.

If your pain has still not been reduced after following the advice above, please call our 24-hour aftercare line on **0345 122 1441**.

## Abortion aftercare

It is important that you take all the time you need to look after yourself. We are here to support you. Here are our recommendations to help your recovery after a medical abortion.

- Use sanitary pads suitable for a heavy flow, not tampons or menstrual cups. This is to avoid infection, and to keep track of your bleeding. Wait until after your next period before using tampons or a menstrual cup.
- Your vagina will clean itself with natural discharge. Do not use a douche as this can disrupt the normal bacteria in the vagina and increase risk of infection.
- If you have been given antibiotics, make sure you take all the tablets you are given as directed.
- Take showers instead of baths for the first 48 hours after treatment. Use fragrance-free soap and water to avoid infection.
- You may feel light-headed after your abortion. For your safety, do not have a shower without someone nearby.
- Drink plenty of water and do not drink alcohol for 48 hours after treatment.
- We advise you do not have sex for 2 weeks to avoid the risk of infection.
- Avoid strenuous activity for at least 2 weeks, including sports or heavy physical work, as this can increase bleeding.
- Avoid swimming for 2 weeks to reduce the risk of infection.

**Serious complications have warning signs. If you experience any of the symptoms below call us straight away.**

- Very heavy bleeding that soaks through more than 2 sanitary pads an hour. These pads should be suitable for a heavy flow.
- Abdominal pain or discomfort that is not helped by pain relief medication, or by using a heat pad.
- Vaginal discharge that smells unpleasant.
- Fever lasting more than 24 hours.

**Sepsis can be caused by an infection. Sepsis after an abortion is rare, but very serious. Symptoms of sepsis can be like having the flu at first.**

If you have any of the signs below it is important to seek urgent medical advice:

- Feeling dizzy or faint
- Confusion
- Slurred speech
- Extreme shivering
- Severe muscle pain
- Being unable to urinate
- Severe breathlessness
- Cold, clammy and pale or blotchy skin
- Loss of consciousness

## **Pregnancy symptoms and testing**

It can be normal to still have tender breasts for a couple of weeks after your abortion. If your breasts are still sore after 2 weeks, please call our 24-hour aftercare line on **0345 122 1441**.

Nausea and vomiting (morning sickness) should stop after a couple of days. This is one of the first pregnancy symptoms to stop after an abortion.

### **If you are breastfeeding**

Small traces of the abortion medication could pass into the breast milk. We recommend that you wait for 5 hours before breastfeeding after taking the second set of medical abortion tablets.

We have given you a pregnancy test to use at home to confirm that the pregnancy has been passed.

Some pregnancy hormones can be present for up to 3 weeks after an abortion. This can give a positive test result even though you are no longer pregnant. We ask that you wait for 3 weeks after your abortion before taking the pregnancy test.

If your pregnancy test is positive, try not to worry. Call our aftercare line on **0345 122 1441** to speak to a nurse. Our team can help you to book an appointment for another ultrasound scan, and further treatment if needed.

## Sexually transmitted infection (STI) testing

You may have had an STI test at your appointment. If you have not had your tests results within 2 weeks after your appointment, please call our test results team on **0345 120 3641**.

If your STI test result is positive, your partner(s) will need to go to a sexual health clinic for testing and for treatment if needed. If you need antibiotics, make sure you take all the tablets you are given as directed.

## Using contraception

We advise that you don't have sex for 2 weeks after your abortion.

It is very important to know that it is possible to get pregnant almost immediately after an abortion. If you do not want to become pregnant, we recommend that you have contraception ready to use. This section will give you information on when you can start using the contraceptive method that we may have provided.

Please keep in mind that condoms are the only contraceptive method that will help protect you against STIs.

For more information about types of contraception that we can provide and how effective they are, visit our website: [www.maristopes.org.uk/contraception](http://www.maristopes.org.uk/contraception)

### **Contraceptive pill**

We offer two contraceptive pill options: the combined pill and the progestogen-only pill (also known as POP or 'mini pill').

Start taking the pill the day after taking the first abortion tablets.

### **Contraceptive patch**

Apply the patch to your skin on your abdomen, buttock, arm, shoulder or the top of your leg the day after taking the first abortion tablets. It will work straight away. Apply a new patch every week to protect you from pregnancy.

### **Contraceptive injection**

Your injection will be given during your treatment appointment and will work straight away. The injection lasts for 13 weeks. You will need to visit your GP every 13 weeks for repeat injections.

### **Contraceptive implant**

The implant will be fitted during your treatment appointment and will work straight away.

In the first few days after insertion, keep the section of your arm where the implant was inserted dry if you can. You can wrap your arm in cling-film when you have a shower. Remove the bandage after 24 hours and remove the dressing after 2 – 3 days.

You will have a small wound where the implant was inserted into your arm, but it should not be painful. If you have any concerns about your wound, call our aftercare line on **0345 122 1441**.

### **Intrauterine Device (IUD) / Intrauterine System (IUS)**

The IUD or IUS cannot be fitted during your medical abortion treatment appointment. If you would like to use one of these methods of contraception please call us for advice on appointment availability, or contact your GP or local sexual health clinic to arrange a fitting. In the meantime we can provide you with a short-term method of contraception, such as the injection or pill, meaning you can leave your appointment knowing that you are protected.

**We hope this booklet has answered all your questions about your aftercare. If you have any other questions, you can all us any time, day or night.**

Aftercare line (24 hours):  
**0345 122 1441**

[services@mariestopes.org.uk](mailto:services@mariestopes.org.uk)

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

Marie Stopes UK, August 2019. Marie Stopes International is a registered charity in England and Wales (reg no. 265543). Company reg no. 1102208. If you have any questions or comments about this booklet, or would like information on the evidence used to produce it, please email [marketing@mariestopes.org.uk](mailto:marketing@mariestopes.org.uk). The information given in this booklet was accurate at the time of going to print. This publication will be reviewed annually. For the latest information visit [mariestopes.org.uk](http://mariestopes.org.uk)

