

Surgical Abortion Aftercare

Support for your recovery
at home

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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.

Advice for travelling home

After your surgical abortion, 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 if you have had a surgical abortion under sedation or general anaesthesia.

- 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.

Side effects

Side effects are common, but short-lasting. Any side effects that you experience will depend on your procedure and anaesthetic used.

Side effects from the surgical procedure may include:

- Bleeding – this can start immediately or up to 72 hours following the procedure. Bleeding can be heavier than a normal period, with small clots, but it is not a period. It can last up to 1 – 2 weeks.
- Pain – cramping pain is normal following the procedure as the womb returns to its normal size. Cramps can be constant or can come and go. It's not unusual to continue to get cramping on and off in the first 2 weeks after treatment.

Side effects from the anaesthetic:

- Drowsiness – you should not drive, sign important documents (such as contracts), or operate heavy machinery for 24 hours after having anaesthetic. Some car insurance specifies that you should not drive for 48 hours after a procedure with anaesthetic, so please check with your insurance provider.
- Nausea and vomiting
- Heightened emotions
- Bruising – you may develop some bruising and pain where the cannula has been inserted into the vein. Bruising usually settles within a week.
- Pain – sometimes you may feel soreness in the vein where the anaesthetic was injected. This settles over a few hours.

Pain relief

You can take pain relief tablets, such as paracetamol or codeine. **Do not take ibuprofen until 12 - 18 hours after your procedure. 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 surgical 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 any strenuous activity, including sports or heavy physical work, until you feel ready to resume it.
- Avoid swimming for 2 weeks to reduce the risk of infection.

Serious complications have warning signs. If you experience any of these symptoms below, you need to call us right 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 a heat pad.
- Vaginal discharge that smells unpleasant.
- Feeling hot and shivery with a high temperature that is 38°C or above.
- Generally feeling unwell.

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

If you develop 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.

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 you a positive 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 test 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 after an abortion it is possible to get pregnant almost immediately. If you do not want to become pregnant, we recommend that you have contraception ready to use. This section will inform you 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.mariestopes.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 surgical treatment.

Contraceptive patch

Apply the patch to your skin on your abdomen, buttock, arm, shoulder or the top of your leg the day after surgical treatment. 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)

If you had the IUD or IUS fitted during your surgical abortion treatment, you will be protected from pregnancy straight away.

If you would like the IUD or IUS fitted after your surgical abortion, you can call us for advice on an appointment to get it fitted, or contact your GP or local sexual health clinic for advice on arranging a fitting.

In the meantime we can provide you with a short-term method of contraception, such as the pill, so 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

www.mariestopes.org.uk

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