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| Abortion procedure - medication |
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## Medication abortion is a way you can intentionally end a pregnancy

The first step is to book an appointment for a medical consultation with a doctor. A nurse may also be involved. During this consultation the health professional/s will:

* confirm if this procedure is suitable for you
* explain the process of having a medication abortion
* discuss the arrangements you have at home to support you
* make the arrangements for the abortion if you decide to go ahead, including prescribing the medications you need
* give you a consent form to sign.

You may have an ultrasound and blood tests at this or another appointment.

If you proceed to have a medication abortion, the procedure is as follows:

* You take the first tablet (mifepristone), either at the clinic or at home. Mifepristone (previously known as RU486) ends a pregnancy by blocking the action of the hormone (progesterone) that supports pregnancy.
* You take the second tablet (misoprostol) 24 to 48 hours later (usually at home). Misoprostol causes the cervix to soften and the uterus to contract to expel the pregnancy.
* The abortion is usually complete four to six hours after taking the second tablet (misoprostol). It may take longer.
* You will usually need a day or two of rest or reduced activity.

## During a medication abortion

After taking the misoprostol tablet, you can expect to experience the following symptoms:

* nausea, vomiting, diarrhoea, dizziness, headaches and fever (this varies between women)
* abdominal (tummy) pain within half an hour (usually much stronger than period pain) and bleeding one to four hours later (heavier than a period). The timing of this can be unpredictable
* after two to six hours, the bleeding usually settles to the level of your normal period for another ten to sixteen days, approximately
* unpredictable, irregular or prolonged bleeding can last for up to four weeks after a medication abortion.

## After a medication abortion

After you have had a medication abortion, be sure to have a blood test and a follow-up medical appointment two to three week afterwards with the doctor or clinic you attended to make sure the procedure is complete and you are no longer pregnant.

To reduce the risk of infection during the week after the abortion, do not:

* insert anything into your vagina, including tampons
* have vaginal sex
* perform any strenuous activity, including sport or heavy physical work, until the bleeding stops
* go swimming or have a bath (you can shower).

## Side effects and complications of a medication abortion

Typical side effects after a medication abortion include:

* pain from uterine cramping
* unpredictable, irregular or prolonged bleeding
* nausea
* vomiting.

### Serious complications of medical abortion are uncommon, but can include the following:

| Complications | Symptoms | Treatment |
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| Haemorrhage (very heavy bleeding)  Occurs in fewer than one in 1,000 women | * Bleeding that fills more than two large pads an hour for more than two hours * Passing blood clots the size of a small lemon * Feeling weak or faint | * Seek urgent medical attention * Call 000 for an ambulance or go to your nearest hospital emergency department (do not drive yourself, have someone take you) * May require blood transfusion |
| Infection Occurs in one in 100 women | Possible:   * pain * abnormal vaginal discharge * fever * tiredness * diarrhoea * vomiting | * Seek immediate medical attention * See your clinic, GP or a hospital emergency department immediately to be treated with antibiotics |
| **Retained products of conception**  Occurs in 2 to 5 in 100 women | * Some pregnancy tissue remains in the uterus and causes ongoing bleeding | * May require repeat tablets or a small surgical procedure to remove them |
| **Procedure does not work**  Occurs in 2 in 100 women | * Continuing pregnancy symptoms such as nausea and vomiting | * The medication abortion tablets can be repeated or a surgical abortion may be required\* |

\*If the abortion does not occur after taking the medications, you will be advised not to continue the pregnancy as in some cases the medications taken may cause malformation of the developing fetus.

## Seek medical assistance if you:

* are not bleeding at all 24 hours after taking misoprostol (the second tablet)
* have continued heavy bleeding
* have signs you are still pregnant after a week.

You can do this by contacting:

* the clinic where the medication abortion took place
* a GP
* your nearest hospital emergency department.

## More Information

This fact sheet is one of three fact sheets about abortion on the Health Translations Directory. Please also see:

* Abortion
* Abortion procedure - surgical

Authorised and published by the Victorian Government, 1 Treasury Place, Melbourne.  
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