





# Surgical Abortion Aftercare

## Support for your recovery at home

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## About this booklet

**This booklet includes information and advice for you to read after your abortion. It is important you look through it carefully and take it home with you. You will also find more useful aftercare and contraception information on the MSI Reproductive Choices UK website: [MSIChoices.org.uk](https://www.MSIChoices.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**.

## **Advice for travelling home**

After your surgical abortion, please be aware of the advice below:

- We recommend you go straight home and rest, and that someone takes you home and stays with you for 24 hours after the procedure.
- If you have had sedation or a general anaesthetic, someone else will need to drive you home. It isn't safe for you to drive yourself.
- After an abortion, there is an increased risk of deep vein thrombosis (DVT – blood clots developing in the legs) if you sit

still for too long. We advise against travelling a long way the day of your treatment. If you are travelling by plane, make sure you walk around regularly during your flight.

- If you have any leg pain, leg swelling, chest pain, breathlessness, dizziness or fainting, either during or soon after the flight, please seek emergency medical attention.

## **Side effects**

Side effects are common after an abortion, but usually short-lived. Any side effects you experience will depend on your procedure and the anaesthetic used.

## Side effects from the surgical procedure may include:

- Bleeding – it is normal to have some bleeding after your surgical abortion. This may be heavier than a normal period, with small clots. It can last for up to two weeks. If it lasts for longer, please call our aftercare line on **0345 122 1441**.
- Pain – cramping pain is normal, as your 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 for up to two weeks.



## **Side effects from the anaesthetic:**

- Drowsiness – it's important you don't drive, sign important documents (such as contracts) or operate heavy machinery for 24 hours after having an anaesthetic. Some car insurance specifies you shouldn't drive for 48 hours after an anaesthetic, so please check with your insurance provider.
- Nausea and vomiting should settle within 24 hours following sedation or a general anaesthetic.
- Bruising – you may develop some bruising and pain where the cannula was inserted in your hand. Bruising usually settles within a week or two
- Pain – you may feel some soreness in the vein where the anaesthetic was injected. This usually settles within a few hours.

## Pain relief

If you are in discomfort, you may want to take some pain relief tablets, such as paracetamol or codeine. **Avoid taking ibuprofen until 12 hours after your procedure, if you had the painkiller suppository. Avoid pain relief that contains aspirin as well, as it can increase bleeding.**

Heat can help with cramps and make you feel more comfortable. Try applying a heat pad or (warm) hot water bottle wrapped in a towel or blanket to your lower abdomen. 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 you take all the time you need to look after yourself after your abortion. We are here to support you.

Here are our recommendations to help with your recovery:

- We recommend you use the sanitary wear you are most comfortable with.
- Your vagina will clean itself with natural discharge. It's best not to use a vaginal 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.
- Drink plenty of water and don't drink alcohol for 48 hours after treatment.
- You may resume sexual or other physical activity when you feel ready to do so

**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**

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 still have symptoms of pregnancy two weeks after your treatment, please call us on **0345 122 1441**.

## Sexually transmitted infection (STI) testing

You may have had an STI test at your appointment. If you haven't had your test results within two weeks, 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

It is important to be aware it's possible to get pregnant after an abortion almost immediately.

If you don't want to fall pregnant, we recommend you have contraception ready to use.

We have outlined when you can start taking different types of contraception below.

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

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

You can start taking the pill the day after surgical treatment.

## **Contraceptive patch**

If you use the contraceptive patch, you can apply this 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**

If you opt for the contraceptive injection, this will be given to you 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**

A contraceptive implant can 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 two to three days.

You will have a small wound where the implant was inserted into your arm, but it shouldn't 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, 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 or 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 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@MSIChoices.org.uk

www.MSIChoices.org.uk

MSI Reproductive Choices UK, January 2021. MSI Reproductive Choices 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@MSIChoices.org.uk](mailto:marketing@MSIChoices.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 [MSIChoices.org.uk](http://MSIChoices.org.uk)

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