

# Consumer information

## Termination of pregnancy

This information sheet aims to answer some commonly asked questions about termination of pregnancy. Informed consent and woman centred care are integral to health care in Queensland. Decisions about your care are always up to you.

**IMPORTANT:** This is general information only. Ask your doctor or midwife about what care is right for you.

### What is a termination of pregnancy?

A termination of pregnancy (also called an abortion) is a procedure that ends a pregnancy. A medical termination is when you take medicines to end the pregnancy. A surgical termination is when you have an operation to end the pregnancy.

### What method is right for you?

Talk with your healthcare provider about which option is right for you. Both methods are safe for most women. The method that is right for you can also depend on:

- how many weeks pregnant you are
- if you have any health issues or allergies
- what services are available in your local area

### What can you expect?

Your healthcare provider will talk with you about what happens. This will include talking about:

- your general health and individual circumstances
- your decision to have a termination and how you are feeling
- the method of termination
- any tests or medication (e.g. blood test, ultrasound scan, screening tests)
- complications or side effects that might happen
- the risk that the procedure or medication might not work
- normal bleeding and pain after a termination and how to manage this
- any follow-up care (especially if the procedure is incomplete)
- the options for contraception

### How much pain is normal?

#### After early medical termination

Strong cramps (and bleeding) usually start 1–2 hours after taking the second medication (misoprostol). Most women pass the pregnancy within 4 hours of taking the misoprostol. Pain and bleeding is often greatest as the pregnancy is expelled. The pain then gets less. Cramping will continue for a week or so after that.

#### After surgical termination

Most women will have cramping on and off for about a week after a surgical termination.

#### To help with pain you can:

- take over the counter pain medicines (analgesia) such as paracetamol and/or ibuprofen
- use hot packs or hot water bottles
- rub your lower abdomen in a circular motion. This may also help to pass any blood clots

If your pain gets worse or doesn't get better, see your health care provider.

	Termination of pregnancy	
	MEDICAL	SURGICAL
How does it happen?	specific medication	an operation
Are you awake or asleep?	awake	asleep or sedated
Where does it happen?	at home if before 9 wks or in hospital	in hospital or day procedure unit
What stage of pregnancy?	any week of pregnancy	usually less than 14–16 weeks
How long does it take?	occurs over 2–4 days	day surgery procedure

Image: comparison of medical and surgical termination



## What is 'normal' bleeding?

Vaginal bleeding is normal after a termination. The amount of blood and how long it lasts is different for everyone. Bleeding usually gets less over a few weeks.

If you soak 2 or more maxi pads within 2 hours, go and see your health professional straight away. Using period underwear (underwear designed to absorb blood) can make it harder to tell how much blood you are losing.

Your first period usually comes 4–6 weeks after your termination. Normal bleeding can:

- last up to 2 weeks after a surgical termination and up to six weeks after a medical termination
- have clots or there may be no clots
- stop and start
- be bright red or brownish in colour

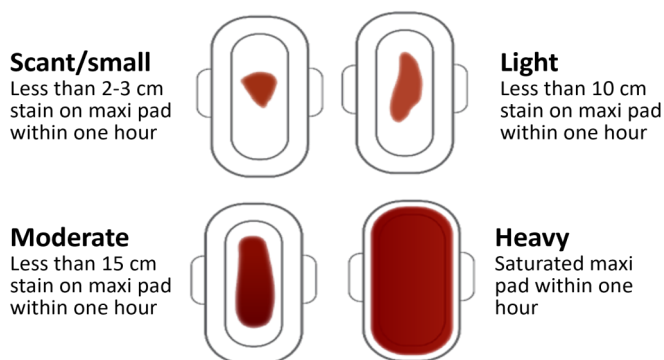


Image: bleeding amounts on sanitary pads

## Is breast soreness normal?

Some women have tender breasts after a termination of pregnancy. It is more likely to happen the further along in the pregnancy you are. You may also have a small amount of milk coming from your breasts. The tenderness and milk production will slowly decrease over a few weeks. Talk to your healthcare provider if your breasts become very painful, red, hot or lumpy.

To help with the symptoms:

- avoid touching your nipples
- wear a firm and supportive bra
- use cold packs on your breasts
- take simple pain medication (e.g. paracetamol or ibuprofen)

## Is infection common?

Infection is not common after a termination of pregnancy. Signs of infection are a high temperature (fever), chills, feeling unwell, abdominal pain or having vaginal discharge that smells bad.

There are things you can do to help decrease your chance of infection after a termination of pregnancy:

- use sanitary pads, not tampons or menstrual cups
- do not put anything in your vagina for 7 days
- avoid vaginal douching (flushing water, or any other fluid, inside your vagina)
- change your pad often
- wash your hands before and after going to the toilet

If you become unwell with signs of infection, contact your healthcare provider

## When can you have sex again?

Waiting for at least 7 days is usually recommended. When you feel ready is the right time.

## When can you start contraception?

You can start any method of contraception straight after your termination. You can also get pregnant right away. Talk to your health care provider about the type of contraception that is right for you.

## What about having a child in the future?

Having a termination of pregnancy does not affect your ability to get pregnant in the future.

## When can you return to normal activities?

Most women can return to their normal activities the day after the termination. Avoid heavy lifting or tiring exercise for about a week. Take any antibiotics or other medicines prescribed for you.

## Your feelings

Women experience a variety of emotions after a termination. There is no 'right' way to feel. Feelings of relief, sadness, anxiety or depression are common. It can be helpful to talk with someone. Especially if you need support or you are struggling to cope. This could be someone close to you, or you might want to talk with your healthcare provider or a counsellor.

## Support & Information

**13HEALTH:** (13 432584) free health information, referral and services to the public. <https://www.qld.gov.au/health/contacts/advice/13health>  
**Pregnancy, Birth & Baby Helpline:** 1800 882 436 free, confidential, professional information and counselling for women, their partners and families relating to issues of conception, pregnancy, birthing and postnatal care. <https://www.health.gov.au/pregnancy/helpline>

**Children by Choice:** 1800 177 725 free, confidential and non-judgmental pregnancy options counselling, information and referrals across Queensland, including post-abortion counselling <https://www.childrenbychoice.org.au>

**1300MHCALL:** Mental Health Access Line 1300 642 255 will link you confidentially to your nearest public health mental health support service in Queensland

**Pregnancy Counselling Link:** 1800 777 690 a free 24 hour counselling support service <https://www.pcl.org.au/>

**Harrison's Little Wings:** 0408 648 759 offers information and support, resources and peer support for women and families with a high risk pregnancy <https://harrisonslittlewings.org.au/>

**Family Planning Alliance Australia:** comprehensive information on family planning contraceptive options <https://www.familyplanningallianceaustralia.org.au>

**Australian Breastfeeding Association:** 1800 686 268 support and help with lactation issues <https://www.breastfeeding.asn.au/>

**Royal Australian College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists:** decision aid for discussions about abortion. <https://ranzcoq.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/Abortion-Decision-Aid.pdf>