

Termination of pregnancy

Information for you

Finding that you have an unplanned pregnancy is emotionally difficult and stressful. You may be considering having a termination of pregnancy (abortion).

This is a very big decision and one where you must take time to consider all the pros and cons. Many people are shocked when they first discover they are pregnant but feel happier once they have had a chance to talk it over with their partner, friends or family. Some then decide to continue with the pregnancy and keep the baby. A small number decide to have the baby adopted, often by couples who can't have children themselves.

Others feel that there is no way they can continue with the pregnancy for personal, financial or health reasons. It is very important that you decide what you want and don't feel pressurised into doing what someone else thinks is best.

Some women feel very guilty after having an abortion. This is less likely if you really think things through and have enough information and support in making the decision that is right for you.

This leaflet explains what happens, and what your choices are if you do decide to have a termination of pregnancy.

How is a pregnancy terminated?

There are three different ways of performing a termination.

surgical termination under general anaesthetic

surgical termination under local anaesthetic

medical termination of pregnancy

Surgical termination under general anaesthetic can be done at the Balfour Hospital up to 12 weeks of pregnancy.

All the termination procedures can be done at Aberdeen Royal Infirmary.

If you are less than 12 weeks pregnant you will have the choice of whether to stay in Orkney or go to Aberdeen. If you are further on than 12 weeks you will have to go to Aberdeen.

Each of these options is described in more detail below.

Surgical termination : general anaesthetic

This method is suitable for pregnancies between 7 and 12 weeks.

It can be done either in Aberdeen or Orkney.

Some patients prefer to go to Aberdeen as they are less likely to meet anyone who knows them in the hospital.

The procedure involves an operation under a light anaesthetic. When you are completely asleep the pregnancy is removed by passing a fine tube through the cervix into the womb. The contents of the womb, including the developing pregnancy are then sucked out into a sealed container.

The operation takes about 10 minutes.

If you want a coil or implant for contraception after the termination, this can be inserted while you are asleep.

If you go to Aberdeen you will be seen at a clinic on one day and usually have the operation the next day.

You may have to find your own accommodation the night before the operation. This is usually a B and B or the Red Cross Hostel.

Normally patients stay in hospital the night after the termination although if everything is fine and you have a responsible adult with you, you may be able to go back to your accommodation at the end of the day. Patients usually fly home the next day. This means you will be away for 3 days/ 2 overnights.

If you have the procedure in Orkney you will usually be in and out of hospital on the same day.

Advantages of this method

Choice of where to have the termination

You are asleep during the procedure

Disadvantages of this method

Need a general anaesthetic.

Very small risk of damage to the uterus by instruments. This may need further surgery.

2. Surgical termination : local anaesthetic

This method is suitable for pregnancies up to 12 weeks and can only be done in Aberdeen.

You will usually be seen at a clinic one day and have the procedure in hospital the next day.

You may have to find your own accommodation the night before the operation. This is usually a B and B or the Red Cross Hostel.

The termination usually takes place in a Day surgery ward.

The doctor looks at the cervix using a speculum (like for a smear or swab test) and uses local anaesthetic to 'numb' the area. When the local anaesthetic has taken effect, the pregnancy is removed by passing a fine tube through the cervix into the womb. The contents of the womb, including the developing pregnancy are then sucked out into a sealed container.

The procedure takes approximately 10 minutes. You may feel period type cramps during the procedure as the uterus returns to normal size.

Afterwards you will be taken to a recovery area briefly before returning to the ward. You will be advised to stay for approximately 45 minutes after the procedure and usually you can return to your accommodation after that. Most people then fly home the next day. This means being away for 3 days/ 2 overnights.

Advantages of this method

Avoids a general anaesthetic.

Usually only in hospital for 3 to 4 hours.

Disadvantages of this method

Very small risk of damage to the uterus by the instruments. This may need further surgery under general anaesthetic.

There may be some discomfort associated with the treatment process (very variable, often described as period type cramps).

Some women don't wish to be aware of the termination process

3. Medical Termination

This method is suitable for pregnancies at all stages up to 20 weeks. It is the **only** method available for pregnancies further on than 12 weeks. It can only be carried out in Aberdeen

First you will have an appointment either at the hospital or at the Aberdeen family planning clinic. You will be given a tablet to swallow, which starts the termination process. You will be able to leave hospital shortly after taking the tablet.

You will be asked to come back to the hospital 2 days later at 8.00am to have the termination procedure. Usually patients stay in a hotel or Band B, or with friends or relations if they know someone in the Aberdeen area.

You may not feel any different during these two days and can expect to carry on with normal activities. However some women have light vaginal bleeding and a few women (less than 1 in 100) fully miscarry at this stage.

When you come back 2 days later you will be admitted to the gynaecology ward, ARI. You will usually get a single room and you can have a friend or relative with you throughout.

Shortly after admission you will have some pessaries (tablets) placed in the vagina. Depending on the stage of pregnancy further tablets will be placed vaginally or given by mouth at 3 to 4 hourly intervals. You will then go on to pass the pregnancy, usually during that afternoon. Usually the termination is complete within 4 to 6 hours.

to stay in the ward for a little while afterwards, usually up to 2 hours, to make sure that you are feeling fine and the bleeding is settling down.

If all the pregnancy tissue does not come away with the tablets, you may need to go to theatre to have any remaining tissue removed surgically This involves passing an instrument through the cervix (neck of the womb) and using gentle suction to empty the uterus (womb).

Advantages of medical method

Usually avoids a general anaesthetic and as no instruments are placed in the uterus, no risk of any damage to the uterus.

Some women feel this is a more “natural” process than surgery, similar to a miscarriage.

Disadvantages of medical method

This method involves staying in Aberdeen a bit longer, usually 4 days.

There is a chance that you may need to stay overnight or have surgery if the pregnancy tissue does not all come away.

Most women have cramp-like discomfort and may feel sick or have diarrhoea.

You would be aware of everything that is happening

Additional information

Orkney Health board will pay your travel and accomodation costs if you choose to travel to Aberdeen for this procedure.

You might want to take a friend or relative with you for company and support. Unfortunately they would have to pay their own way (unless you are under 16 years old in which case you would qualify for an adult escort to accompany you.)

Remember if you have second thoughts about having a termination you can change your mind **at any time**. Don't be afraid to tell the doctors or nurses about your concerns.

Women wanting to find out more about termination of pregnancy can see their GP or practice nurse for further information. They can provide confidential and sensitive and guidance to help you consider all your options and make a decision. If you choose to have a termination of pregnancy, they will help you to select the method that is best for your situation.

