



ABORTION

**Because sometimes
it's just the right
thing to do.**

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An abortion is a procedure carried out to stop you being pregnant. You may also hear it called a "termination of pregnancy."

Abortions are LEGAL in England. They have to be carried out before the 24th week of pregnancy, unless there is something very wrong with the foetus or the mother's life is at risk. Abortions in the NHS are FREE and CONFIDENTIAL (nobody else is told about them.)

People have different opinions on whether abortion is right or not. Some people's opinions can be fixed and one-sided. You should remember this when you look for information and advice about abortion. Some information (e.g. on websites,) is not true and designed to put you off abortion.

Family planning clinics such as Conifer House, the Warren counsellors and the sexual health nurse that does the drop in at the Warren can be trusted to give you clear, truthful information about abortion.

If you are thinking about having an abortion, it would be ideal for you to have somebody to rely on for support. This might be your mum, sister, aunt, nan, a trusted friend or carer.

There are many things that people say about having an abortion that are myths (not true.)

Myth: "If you ask for an abortion and you are under 16, the doctor has to inform your parents."

Fact: By law, you CAN have an abortion without your parents knowing. The doctor must be certain that you understand what an abortion involves, and what the risks are.

The doctor will encourage, but not force you, to tell your parents. This is because, if you are under 16, a parent or an adult woman has to come with you for the abortion and take you home afterwards. That woman also has to be there to look after you overnight. You are not allowed to come by yourself or go home alone afterwards and men other than your dad are not allowed to be responsible for you.

The Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists (September 2004) Evidence based Clinical Guideline Number 7: The Care Of Women Requesting Induced Abortion
<http://www.rcog.org.uk/files/rcog-corp/uploaded-files/NEBInducedAbortionfull.pdf>

Department of Health (29 July 2004) Best practice guidance for doctors and other health professionals on the provision of advice and treatment to young people under 16 on contraception, sexual and reproductive health.
http://www.dh.gov.uk/prod_consum_dh/groups/dh_digitalassets/@dh/@en/documents/digitalasset/dh_4086914.pdf

Myth: "Your doctor can stop you having an abortion if he/she believes they are wrong."

Fact: No they cannot. If your doctor does not agree with abortion he/she does not have to arrange one for you. However, your doctor MUST pass you on to another doctor who will be happy to help.

Even if the doctor does not agree with abortion, they should still treat you with respect.

General Medical Council (2008) Personal Beliefs and Medical Practice
http://www.gmc-uk.org/guidance/ethical_guidance/personal_beliefs/personal_beliefs.asp

Myth: "If you have an abortion, you won't be able to get pregnant in the future."

Fact: An uncomplicated abortion will not stop you getting pregnant in the future. Only 2 women in every 1,000 will experience complications so the risk is low.

The Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists (September 2004) Evidence based Clinical Guideline Number 7: The Care Of Women Requesting Induced Abortion
<http://www.rcog.org.uk/files/rcog-corp/uploaded-files/NEBInducedAbortionfull.pdf>

Myth: "Abortions cause breast cancer."

Fact: Abortions do not increase your risk of getting breast cancer.

The Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists (September 2004) Evidence based Clinical Guideline Number 7: The Care Of Women Requesting Induced Abortion
<http://www.rcog.org.uk/files/rcog-corp/uploaded-files/NEBInducedAbortionfull.pdf>

Myth: "The father of the pregnancy can go to Court to stop you having an abortion."

Fact: The father of the pregnancy has NO LEGAL RIGHT to know that you are pregnant, decide if you will have an abortion, or even be told if you have one.

Family Planning Association (July 2009) Abortion: your questions answered.
<http://www.fpa.org.uk/Information/Readourinformationbooklets/abortion#HsKE>

What needs to happen before I can have an abortion?

Be sure that you are pregnant – visit a family planning clinic or the sexual health worker or nurse at the Warren for a free test.

If you decide that you want an abortion, an appointment will be arranged for you at the hospital.

This appointment may last several hours. During the appointment, you will have:

- A scan to see how many weeks pregnant you are.
- A talk with a doctor and a nurse about your general health and about the different types of abortion that you could have. You will also be given written information.
- A discussion about your contraceptive choices for after the abortion
- Opportunity to ask questions and talk through your choices.
- Opportunity to have a session arranged with the hospital abortion counsellor.
- Some blood taken for tests.
- Tests to look for sexually transmitted infections such as Chlamydia. Infections can cause complications so they need to be diagnosed and treated.
- All under 16s see a social worker as a routine. They are there to support, not tell you what to do. This contact is to confirm there are no child protection issues that is, that the young person has not been in harmful relationships.

After this appointment you can still change your mind about having an abortion.

Hull and East Yorkshire Hospitals NHS Trust (July 2007) Termination of Pregnancy: Information for Partners/Carers. Hull and East Yorkshire: Hull and East Yorkshire NHS Trust. Reference number 7154 British Pregnancy Advisory Service (January 2009) ABORTION IN PRACTICE: A guide for GPs.

http://www.bpas.org/js/filemanager/files/abortion_in_practice_a_guide_for_gps.pdf

How is abortion carried out?

There are different types of abortion. The types that you will be offered will depend on how long you have been pregnant. The earlier in the pregnancy you choose to have an abortion, the safer it is and the more choice you will have.

Medical Abortion (The "abortion pill")

A medical abortion can be carried out up to the 9th week of pregnancy. You will need to come to the hospital twice. The visits will be 1 or 2 days apart.

Your first visit:

This visit is short. You will be given a tablet to swallow to stop the pregnancy. You cannot change your mind after you take this tablet! You will need to wait for an hour before you can go home. Rarely the tablet may make you feel sick, have some bleeding and some period-like pains.

Your second visit:

You will be given tablets to dissolve in your mouth. These tablets will cause your uterus (womb) to squeeze out the pregnancy. You may have some heavy bleeding and period-like pains. A nurse will be there all the time to give you painkillers if you need them.

For most people, the medical abortion is straightforward and they can go home after several hours. Rarely, you may need to come back to the hospital for a scan or stay in hospital overnight.

Hull and East Yorkshire Hospitals NHS Trust (April 2002) Medical Termination of Pregnancy.
Hull and East Yorkshire: Hull and East Yorkshire NHS Trust.

Reference number 0373

Myth: “The morning-after (emergency contraception) pill is the same as the abortion pill.”

Fact: The pills used for a medical abortion are different to those used for emergency contraception. The emergency pill is used to PREVENT a pregnancy. It will not cause an abortion if the woman is already pregnant.

British Pregnancy Advisory Service (January 2009) ABORTION IN PRACTICE: A guide for GPs.

http://www.bpas.org/js/filemanager/files/abortion_in_practice_a_guide_for_gps.pdf

Surgical Abortion (The “suction method”)

This can be carried out up to the 14th week of pregnancy in Hull.

Before the abortion, you will be given tablets to make your cervix (neck of the womb) soft and stretchy. This makes the abortion safer. You cannot change your mind after you have taken these tablets! Surgical abortions are usually carried out under general anaesthesia (where you are sent to sleep.) The abortions are carried out in an operating theatre. Once you are asleep, your cervix will be open so that a small suction tube can be passed through its opening. The pregnancy is carefully sucked out.

After the abortion you will be taken to a recovery room then the ward to rest. You will usually be allowed to go home the same day.

Hull and East Yorkshire Hospitals NHS Trust (July 2007) Surgical Termination of Pregnancy. Hull and East Yorkshire: Hull and East Yorkshire NHS Trust. Reference number 07-156

Later Abortions (Abortions after the 14th week of pregnancy)

Later abortions are not carried out very often. You will need to travel to another city to have a late abortion. A late abortion can either be carried out with the abortion pill or by an operation whilst asleep.

Medical late abortions (the abortion pill,) are carried out in the same way as they are under 9 weeks of pregnancy. However, the procedure may take longer, with tablets more often, because you are further on in pregnancy and you are more likely to stay overnight. There is also a chance that you might need surgery (an operation,) to make sure that your womb is empty.

The operation used to end a late pregnancy is called “Dilatation and Evacuation.” It is similar to having a surgical abortion before 14 weeks of pregnancy.

You will be given tablets before the abortion to make your cervix (neck of the womb) soft and stretchy. You cannot change your mind after you have taken these tablets!

The procedure will be carried out in an operating theatre under general anaesthetic (where you are sent to sleep.) Once you are asleep, your cervix will be gently stretched so that it is slightly open. Small forceps (tongs) and suction are used to remove the pregnancy from your womb.

After the abortion you will be taken to a recovery room to rest. You may need to stay in hospital overnight.

If you are very late on in pregnancy (over 20 weeks,) a “two stage” procedure may be used. You are put to sleep for both stages.

In stage 1, you have an operation to start off the softening and stretching of your cervix (the neck of your womb,) in preparation for stage 2. You will then stay in hospital overnight. In stage 2, you have an operation to remove the pregnancy from your womb.

Myth: “The early pregnancy can feel pain.”

Fact: Not true. Abortions are carried out before the pregnancy has developed the nerve pathways needed to be able to feel pain.

British Pregnancy Advisory Service (January 2009) ABORTION IN PRACTICE: A guide for GPs.

http://www.bpas.org/js/filemanager/files/abortion_in_practice_a_guide_for_gps.pdf

National Health Service (March 2008) Abortion – how is it performed? <http://www.nhs.uk/Conditions/Abortion/Pages/How-is-it-performed.aspx> (accessed 28th September 2009)

What happens after the abortion?

Most people will not need to stay in hospital overnight after an early abortion. Whatever your age, you will need to have a responsible adult with you to take you home and look after you overnight.

The hospital will give you a 24 hour telephone number to call if you have any questions or worries after the abortion.

What symptoms can I expect to have after an abortion?

After an abortion you can expect to have:

- Possibly side effects from medicines used
- Bleeding
- Mild pain

Side effects of the abortion pill may include sickness, diarrhoea, headaches, dizziness, flushing and sweating. These should not last for longer than 3 days.

Side effects of general anaesthesia (being put to sleep) may include sickness, sleepiness and itching. These should not last for longer than 2 days.

It is normal to bleed for 1-2 weeks after an abortion, with the bleeding getting less with time.

You may also have some period-type pains in your lower abdomen for about a week afterwards.

You should have a follow-up appointment a couple of weeks after your abortion, to check that everything went ok. You can choose if you want to have this at the hospital, at your GPs or at a family planning clinic.

You may experience a rollercoaster of different feelings after an abortion. You may feel relief, anger, sadness, regret or guilt. These feelings are normal and usually resolve with time. If you are finding it hard to cope, you can arrange to see a counsellor. It doesn't matter how long ago your abortion took place.

British Pregnancy Advisory Service (January 2009) ABORTION IN PRACTICE: A guide for GPs.

http://www.bpas.org/js/filemanager/files/abortion_in_practice_a_guide_for_gps.pdf

Hull and East Yorkshire Hospitals NHS Trust (July 2007) Surgical Termination of Pregnancy. Hull and East Yorkshire: Hull and East Yorkshire NHS Trust. Reference number 07-156

Hull and East Yorkshire Hospitals NHS Trust (April 2002) Medical Termination of Pregnancy. Hull and East Yorkshire: Hull and East Yorkshire NHS Trust. Reference number 0373

Myth: “You can't get pregnant if you have just had an abortion.”

Fact: You CAN get pregnant STRAIGHT AWAY after having an abortion.

As part of your abortion care, you will be offered the full range of contraceptive choices before you leave the hospital. These will include, amongst other choices, the safest and most effective contraceptives – the implant (rod,) Mirena (hormone coil) or copper coil or the contraceptive injection. If you are having a surgical abortion, you can have any of these whilst you are asleep.

The doctor or nurse will talk about contraception with you when you come for your first hospital appointment, and answer any questions you might have.

Hull and East Yorkshire Hospitals NHS Trust (July 2007) Surgical Termination of Pregnancy. Hull and East Yorkshire: Hull and East Yorkshire NHS Trust.

Reference number 07-156

What are the risks of having an abortion?

Although hospital abortions are safe and effective, they are not entirely risk-free. Approximately 2 in 1,000 women will experience a complication after having an abortion.

Department of Health (2007) Abortion Statistics, England and Wales

http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publicationsandstatistics/Publications/PublicationsStatistics/DH_085508

What can go wrong?

- Infection. Antibiotics are given to reduce the risk of this.
- A 'failed abortion.' This means that you are still pregnant after the abortion. This is only likely in very early abortions.
- Having part of the pregnancy remaining in your womb (doctors call this "retained products of conception.")
- Damage to the cervix and womb during a surgical abortion.
- Problems associated with the anaesthetic (being put to sleep.) You will be given a separate leaflet about these by the hospital.

All of these risks are unlikely if you follow the doctors and nurses advice on how to look after yourself.

What can I do to protect myself?

To protect yourself against infection:

- Do NOT have sex again for at least 2 weeks after the abortion, or until your bleeding has stopped.
- Use sanitary towels instead of tampons until the period after your bleeding stops. Be aware of the 'warning signs' of infection and contact a doctor immediately if you notice any.

What should I look out for?

- Pain in your lower tummy that is severe, doesn't go away or suddenly gets worse.
- Fever (a high temperature.)
- Bleeding that is heavy, doesn't go away or suddenly gets heavier.
- Discharge from your vagina that smells bad.
- Generally feeling unwell.

You will need to speak to a doctor immediately – if you do not, you could become seriously unwell or a long term health problem could develop.

British Pregnancy Advisory Service (January 2009) ABORTION IN PRACTICE: A guide for GPs.

http://www.bpas.org/js/filemanager/files/abortion_in_practice_a_guide_for_gps.pdf

Hull and East Yorkshire Hospitals NHS Trust (July 2007) Surgical Termination of Pregnancy. Hull and East Yorkshire: Hull and East Yorkshire NHS Trust. Reference number 07-156

Where can I go for information and support?

If you think you might be pregnant and are unsure of your choices, there are many places you can go for help:

- Your GP (family doctor.)
- The Warren sexual health advisor. Call 01482 221416
- A family planning clinic, such as Conifer House. Visit www.luvhull.co.uk or call 01482 336 336.

If you need somebody to talk through your feelings in private, call:

- The Warren Counselling Team on 01482 221416.
- Conifer House on 01482 336336

If you want to know what kind of support is available if you choose to continue with the pregnancy, call:

- Teenage Pregnancy Support Service (TPSS) on 01482 336 379. TPSS provide information and advice on a range of issues including housing and benefits, preparation for birth and parenthood, education and health.

If your relationship with your partner is being affected by the pregnancy, call:

- Relate on 01482 329 621

If you want information on contraception and sexually transmitted infections:

- www.cluedupinhull.co.uk
- www.luvhull.co.uk
- www.condomessentialwear.co.uk
- Brook Advisory Service. Visit www.brook.org.uk or call 0800 0185 023.
- Sexwise for young people aged 12-18. Visit www.choices.co.uk or call 0800 28 29 30.
- www.fpa.org.uk

Partners'

An unplanned pregnancy can be just as stressful and confusing for men as it is for their partners. You might feel pressure to brush aside your feelings as if they don't matter, since it is not you that is pregnant. Remember, your thoughts are real and just as important, so it is vital that you seek help if you are finding it hard to cope.

Where can I go for support?

Be careful who you talk to about the pregnancy. Although you might want to talk to your mates, your partner might (not) want anyone to know that she is pregnant. Agree beforehand who you will share information with.

If you need somebody to talk to in private, get in contact with the Counselling Service at the Warren. Their telephone number is 01482 221416

Many men find it difficult to talk about pregnancy options with their partners. If you find that the pregnancy is causing problems in your relationship, call Relate on 01482 329 621 or Young Mens Sexual Health Worker at Cornerhouse on 01482 327044. They can sometimes offer professional relationship counselling.

Can I stop her having an abortion?

Some men also have very strong views towards abortion. If this is the case remember that, although you are entitled to your own opinions, the decision ultimately lies with the woman. Men have no legal right to be informed of their partner's decision or be involved in the decision-making process.

What will happen after the abortion?

If your partner chooses to have an abortion, she may feel moody and sensitive afterwards as her hormones return to normal. She will also need some time to recover from her experience. All women are different and nobody can predict how much time she will need. During this time, she will need you to be supportive and offer her reassurance. You must not have sex for at least two weeks after the abortion or until the bleeding stops, to prevent infection. Remember, it might take a while for your partner to feel like having sex again.

What if she doesn't want an abortion?

If your partner decides to continue with the pregnancy, you can both seek advice from the Teenage Pregnancy Support Service based at Conifer House. Their telephone number is 01482 336 379. They also run sessions especially for teenage dads and dads-to-be.

This leaflet was written with the support of Conifer House, to help young people understand what abortion is all about, and to help them know what to expect if they have one. It is not meant to replace any advice given to you by your doctor. Please contact a health professional (see the "information and support" page,) if you have any questions about abortion.

**For free, friendly and confidential sexual health clinics in Hull call
Conifer House on 01482 336336 or visit www.luvhull.co.uk**

References:

1. British Pregnancy Advisory Service (January 2009) ABORTION IN PRACTICE: A guide for GPs.
http://www.bpas.org/js/filemanager/files/abortion_in_practice_a_guide_for_gps.pdf
2. Family Planning Association (July 2009) Abortion: your questions answered.
<http://www.fpa.org.uk/Information/Readourinformationbooklets/abortion#HsKE>
3. Hull and East Yorkshire Hospitals NHS Trust (July 2007) Surgical Termination of Pregnancy. Hull and East Yorkshire NHS Trust.
Reference number 07-156
4. Hull and East Yorkshire Hospitals NHS Trust (July 2007) Termination of Pregnancy; Information for Partners/Carers. Hull and East Yorkshire NHS Trust.
Reference number 7154
5. Hull and East Yorkshire Hospitals NHS Trust (April 2002) Medical Termination of Pregnancy. Hull and East Yorkshire NHS Trust.
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6. The Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists (September 2004) Evidence based Clinical Guideline Number 7: The Care Of Women Requesting Induced Abortion
<http://www.rcog.org.uk/files/rcog-corp/uploaded-files/NEBInducedAbortionfull.pdf>
7. General Medical Council (2008) Personal Beliefs and Medical Practice
http://www.gmc-uk.org/guidance/ethical_guidance/personal_beliefs/personal_beliefs.asp
8. Department of Health (2007) Abortion Statistics, England and Wales
http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publicationsandstatistics/Publications/PublicationsStatistics/DH_085508
9. Department of Health (29 July 2004) Best practice guidance for doctors and other health professionals on the provision of advice and treatment to young people under 16 on contraception, sexual and reproductive health.
http://www.dh.gov.uk/prod_consum_dh/groups/dh_digitalassets/@dh/@en/documents/digitalasset/dh_4086914.pdf

Free, Confidential, Unbiased Information and Support for anyone aged 14 - 25

Counselling Service,

The Warren, 47-49 Queens Dock Avenue, Hull, HU1 3DR

Tel 01482 221416

The Warren works in dynamic partnership with the NHS and Hull City Council

