

Surgical Termination of Pregnancy

What is it?

Surgical termination of pregnancy is a safe day-surgery procedure. It can be performed anywhere between 7 to 22 weeks. Women may have a termination for an unintended pregnancy or because of pregnancy complications. If it is for an unintended pregnancy, this will need to happen at a private facility and there may be costs.

What do I need to do to prepare?

You will not be able to drive for 24 hours and you will need to arrange for someone to take you home. Your appointment may be cancelled if you can't provide the details of who will be going home with you. You will be given instructions from the service doing the procedure. This will include when you will need to fast from and when to take any regular medications. Make sure you tell the service if you are on any blood thinners or medication for diabetes.

It is helpful to:

- Bring all the scans and reports that your GP gave you to the appointment
- Wear two-piece clothing such as a top and skirt or loose-fitting pants. Also bring extra underwear
- Bring something to read while you are waiting

What will happen?

You will need to change into a surgical gown (the sort that open at the back). If you are having IV sedation, a drip will be put in your arm. This is used to give you the anaesthetic and sometimes antibiotics. There are two types you may be given and this will be discussed with you before the procedure.

- **Twilight anaesthetic plus local anaesthetic** – this makes you feel like you feel like you are floating. A local anaesthetic is then given to stop you feeling anything. There are few health risks with this option.
- **General anaesthetic** – this puts you to sleep. You won't feel anything and will wake up after the procedure is finished. There are some health risks with this option.
- Some women choose to only have a local. This means you are alert the whole time but can't feel anything in your cervix or uterus. However, getting the local anaesthetic can be painful.

The type of procedure used depends on how far along the pregnancy is:

- **Up to 14 weeks gestation (vacuum curettage)** – the cervix is dilated (widened) and the contents of the uterus is removed using gentle. A spoon shaped instrument called a curette is used to check the uterus is empty. The procedure takes a few minutes but you will then have to rest and recover for a few hours.
- **After 14 weeks gestation (dilation and evacuation)** – the cervix is dilated and instruments are used to remove the contents of the uterus. For pregnancies after 16 weeks, you may need to attend appointments over two weeks. This is because the cervix needs to be widened further. You will need to stay somewhere close by.

Many clinics can also insert an intra-uterine device (IUD). This is a type of long-acting removable contraceptive. It is cheaper and easier than having it inserted later. If you are having this procedure because of an unplanned pregnancy, talk to the clinic when you make your appointment about whether this is an option.

When should I be concerned?

Seek medical assistance if you have any of the following:

Fever (temperature more than 38 degrees)

Vaginal discharge

Foul smelling odour from the vagina

Heavy blood loss

Cramping in the abdominal region

This can be from the service that provided the termination, your GP or your local hospital Emergency Department

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What can I expect after?

You may have some mild cramping and bleeding after. You may also feel some 'morning sickness' and breast tenderness. You can use over the counter pain medication to manage any pain from the cramping.

Infections occur in two percent of cases. To reduce your risk of infection, take any antibiotic medication the clinic prescribes as instructed. For the first two weeks after the termination, you should also:

Have nothing in your vagina. This means not having sex or using tampons.

Avoid baths or swimming (showers are fine).

Avoid excessive or strenuous exercise.

You will need to have a check-up two weeks after the procedure. This may be with the service who performed the procedure or your GP.

What supports are available?

It is important to think about what support you may need. A termination of pregnancy can be stressful and upsetting, especially if this is happening because of pregnancy complications. Think about who can support you during this time and consider taking time off work or school.

Consider talking to your GP about a referral to a counsellor or you can contact the following support lines:

- Family Planning NSW: **1300 658 886**
- Pregnancy Counselling Australia: **1300 737 732**

Where can I learn more?

- **Children by Choice** - surgical abortion: childrenbychoice.org.au
- **Marie Stopes Australia** - surgical abortion: mariestopes.org.au

This information is to be viewed by someone who has received a diagnosis from their doctor. It is not designed to be used to diagnose a condition or as a substitute for ongoing medical care

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