

# Abortion

Having an abortion means you choose to end your pregnancy. Not all pregnancies are planned. Unplanned pregnancies happen to women of all ages and backgrounds. About half the pregnancies in Australia are unplanned. Some women choose to have their baby, while others choose to end their pregnancy with abortion.



## What is abortion?

Abortion is a safe medical procedure that ends a pregnancy. It may also be referred to as a 'termination' or 'pregnancy termination'. It's estimated that about one third of unplanned pregnancies are ended.

## Is abortion legal in Australia?

Abortion in Australia is only legal if done by a registered medical professional. But abortion laws vary between states and territories. The different laws are about how and when women can access abortion.

## Reasons for abortion

Abortion is a personal choice. It can be a hard decision to make. There are many reasons why you might choose to have an abortion. Regardless of the reason, it's your choice to end your pregnancy.

## Types of abortion

There are two types of abortion: medical abortion and surgical abortion. Both are safe and effective.

### Medical abortion

A medical abortion means you take medications to cause a miscarriage. It can be performed on a pregnancy up to nine weeks.

### What you can expect

If you have a medical abortion, you will have several hours of intense cramping, but the pain should ease once you have had the miscarriage. Your doctor can prescribe stronger pain medication to help. You should be able to manage at home.

### Surgical abortion

If you are more than nine weeks pregnant, or you don't want to have a medical abortion, you may choose to have a surgical abortion instead. Surgical abortion is usually done as a day procedure.

### What you can expect

If you have a surgical abortion under **general anaesthetic** (while you are asleep), you will not experience any pain during the abortion. But you may have cramping for a few days afterwards. If you have a surgical abortion under **local anaesthetic**, you are likely to feel mild to strong cramps during the abortion. It's also normal to have cramping and pain that's similar to a period for the next few days.

To relieve pain, you can:

- use heat packs
- take pain relief medication
- massage your lower abdomen
- rest.

If you have severe pain, or pain that doesn't get better with pain relief medication, talk to your doctor.

## When can you return to normal activities?

You can return to normal activities the day after an abortion if you feel physically and emotionally well. But for the next one to two weeks, you should avoid:

- heavy lifting, physical work and strenuous activities
- having sex, using tampons and inserting anything in your vagina
- having baths or going swimming.

## How much does an abortion cost?

The cost of an abortion depends on:

- the type of abortion
- your stage of pregnancy
- where you have the abortion (e.g. public or private clinic)
- if you are eligible for Medicare
- if you have private health insurance
- if you need to travel to a clinic.

If you have a Medicare card and visit a private clinic:

- medical abortion may cost \$100–\$500
- surgical abortion may cost \$400–\$600.

Some clinics or public hospitals may have lower fees or there may be no charge if you are eligible. Your doctor can give you more information.

## Do you need a referral to have an abortion?

You do not need a referral from your doctor to book an abortion – except in Western Australia where it's legally required.

## Do you need to have counselling before having an abortion?

You do not need to have counselling, but it is available if you want to talk to someone or need more information.

### More information

You can get more information about abortion from:

- your doctor
- a family planning or sexual health organisation in your area
- a local women's health centre
- your local [Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Medical Service](#)

You can also visit these reliable and reputable websites:

- [MSI Australia](#) (formerly Marie Stopes Australia)
- [1800MyOptions](#) (Vic)
- [Children by Choice](#) (Qld)
- [Pregnancy Choices Helpline](#) (NSW)
- [Pregnancy Advisory Centre](#) (SA)

For more information, visit [jeanhailes.org.au/health-a-z/sex-sexual-health/abortion](http://jeanhailes.org.au/health-a-z/sex-sexual-health/abortion)

### Updated September 2022

This fact sheet is designed to be informative and educational. It is not intended to provide specific medical advice or replace advice from your medical practitioner.

Jean Hailes for Women's Health gratefully acknowledges the support of the Australian Government.

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Jean Hailes takes a broad and inclusive approach to the topic of women's health. The terms 'women' and 'girls' are used throughout this resource to refer to all women, girls, and gender-diverse people.

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