

THE BODY POLITIC

# MEDICAL ABORTION

ABORTION WITH PILLS UP TO 10 WEEKS





# SOME FACTS...

- Medical Abortion is the most common type of abortion worldwide. (World Health Organisation)
- Medical Abortion is healthcare and **should be provided through a registered healthcare provider.**
- Medical Abortion can be self managed at home up to 10 weeks or taken within a healthcare setting, depending on the patients wishes and the regulations that the provider is required to adhere to, eg in England, Scotland, Wales and the Republic of Ireland, telemedicine is available, however in (NI) it is not.
- Whilst early medical abortions from 10 to 13 weeks can be completed with medication, according to World Health Organisation guidelines, **those who are plus 10 weeks pregnant will need to have their abortion managed in a healthcare setting.**



# SOME FACTS...

- **Medical Abortion has a very low rate of serious complications and is very effective at ending early pregnancy.** (Guttmacher Institute & National Academies of Sciences, Engineering & Medicine) <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK507236/>
- Research has also shown that telemedicine is likewise safe, effective and works well for patients. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0010782421000913>
- Medical Abortion is a can be taken safely and effectively both inside and outside of a clinic setting. Its convenience and accessibility has made it a renewed target for opponents of abortion, who seek to misrepresent the method's safety, stigmatise it and ultimately deter its use.
- **Medical Abortion is healthcare.**



# MEDICATION USED

**WITH:**

**Mifepristone & Misoprostol**

**NOT:**

**Unregulated medication**

**Herbs**

**Massage**

**Insertion of objects in to uterus**

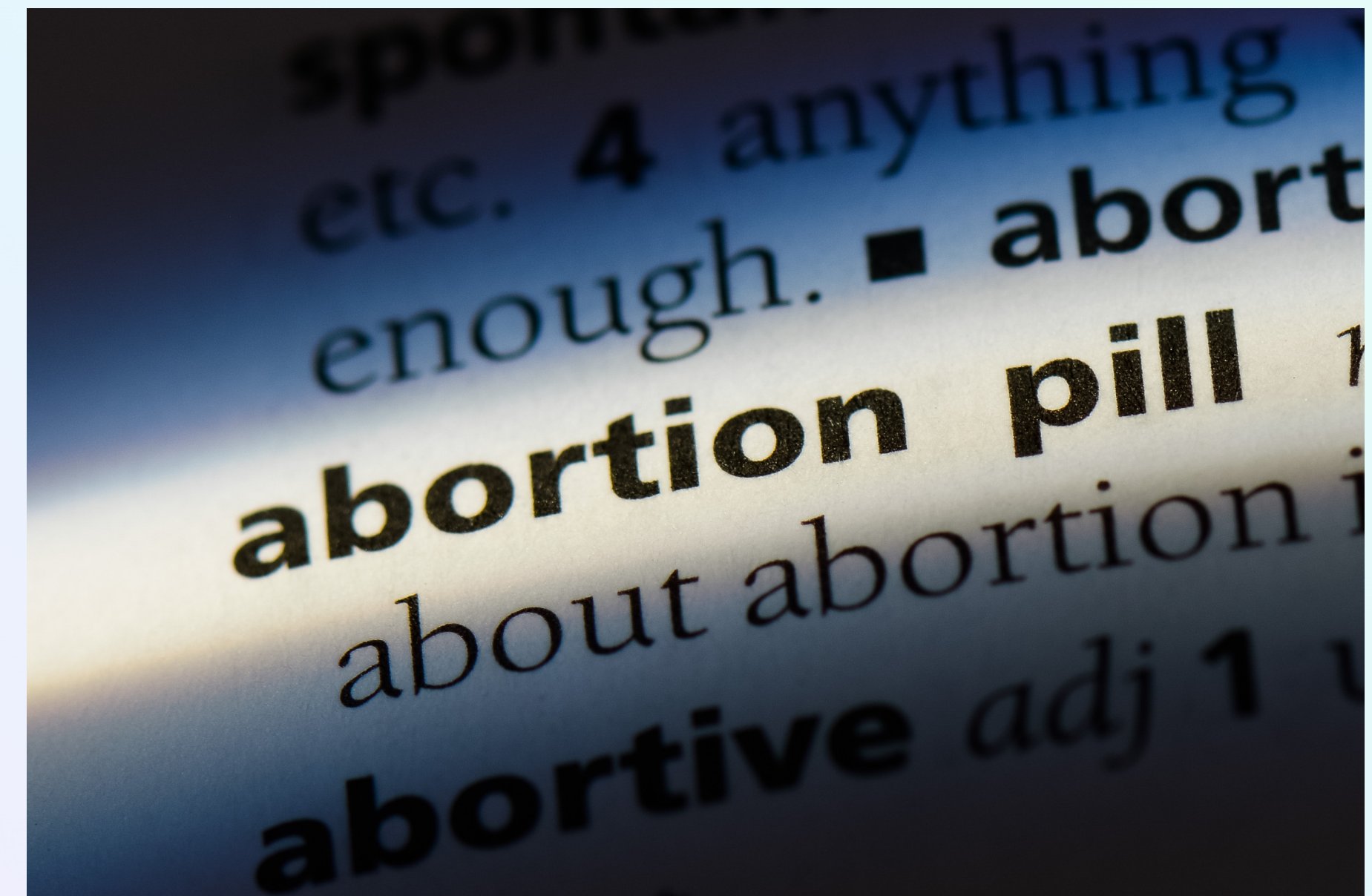
**Blows to the abdomen or uterus**





# WHAT EVERYONE NEEDS TO KNOW ABOUT ABORTION WITH PILLS

- What is a medical abortion?
- Who can use abortion pills?
- How should abortion pills be used?
- How do abortion pills work?
- What can you expect with a medical abortion?
- Are abortion pills safe?
- What are the possible complications?
- How do I know the abortion pills have worked and the abortion was successful?





# WHAT IS A MEDICAL ABORTION?

- A medical abortion is an **induced miscarriage with pills**.
- **One in three women** will have at least one abortion in their lifetime.
- A miscarriage whether spontaneous or with pills has the **same symptoms** and the treatment and management of any complications are the same.
- **15 to 20% of pregnancies end in miscarriage.**



# WHO CAN USE ABORTION PILLS?

- **People seeking an early medical abortion who are up to 10 weeks pregnant.**
- People with no contraindications - previous allergic reactions to this medication, known or suspected ectopic pregnancy, inherited porphyria, chronic adrenal failure, hemorrhagic disorders, heart disease, severe asthma and severe anaemia.
- Anyone with an Inter-uterine device (IUD), commonly known as 'the coil' **should have it removed before taking the medication.**
- Further reading on worldwide protocols - <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/WHO-SRH-22.1>



# HOW SHOULD ABORTION PILLS BE USED?

- A woman or pregnant person should confirm their pregnancy by way of a **urine test or ultrasound**.
- A woman or pregnant person should know **how many weeks pregnant she is**. This can be done by counting the weeks from the first day of the last period.
- A woman should make a plan and ideally have someone with her when using the misoprostol.
- The woman should check for contraindications and have an IUD removed.
- **The medications should only be used when transportation to a hospital is possible within two hours.**
- It is critical that the woman or pregnant person's is choosing the abortion of their own free will and is not being forced or coerced.



# HOW DO ABORTION PILLS WORK?

One Mifepristone tablet is swallowed - Mifepristone blocks the hormone progesterone needed to maintain the pregnancy. The uterine lining begins to break down.

24 hours later 4 Misoprostol tablets are dissolved in the buccal cavity. More Misoprostol medication can be taken if required and with guidance from the healthcare provider on amounts and duration between dosage). Your healthcare provider will usually provide up to 8 tablets in a supply of this medication. Misoprostol works by clearing the uterus by making it contract.

**World Health Organisation (WHO) also provides information on using the Misoprostol vaginally or under the tongue if preferred.**



# WHAT CAN YOU EXPECT WITH A MEDICAL ABORTION?

- Mifepristone - notable side effects, though some women have reported light bleeding after taking this medication.
- Misoprostol - normal side effects - the most common are bleeding and cramps that may begin immediately or a few hours after taking the medication.
- Misoprostol - may also cause diarrhoea, vomiting, fever and chills and headaches. **It is important that if you vomit, that you ensure you have ingested the medication.** If you experience vomiting, please make your health provider aware, as you may need to take more medication. Some clinics will provide anti-sickness medication along with the abortion medication.



# NORMAL SIDE EFFECTS OF MISOPROSTOL:



- Vomiting, Diarrhoea, Fever and Headache.
- You can take pain relief such as paracetamol, ibuprofen or codeine during your abortion - **whichever painkiller is suitable for you.**
- It is advisable to have a supply of sanitary towels that are suitable for heavy or very heavy flow.
- You may wish to have a some comfort items such as a **hot water bottle.**
- Ensure you make yourself comfortable, **drink fluids and rest as much as you can.**



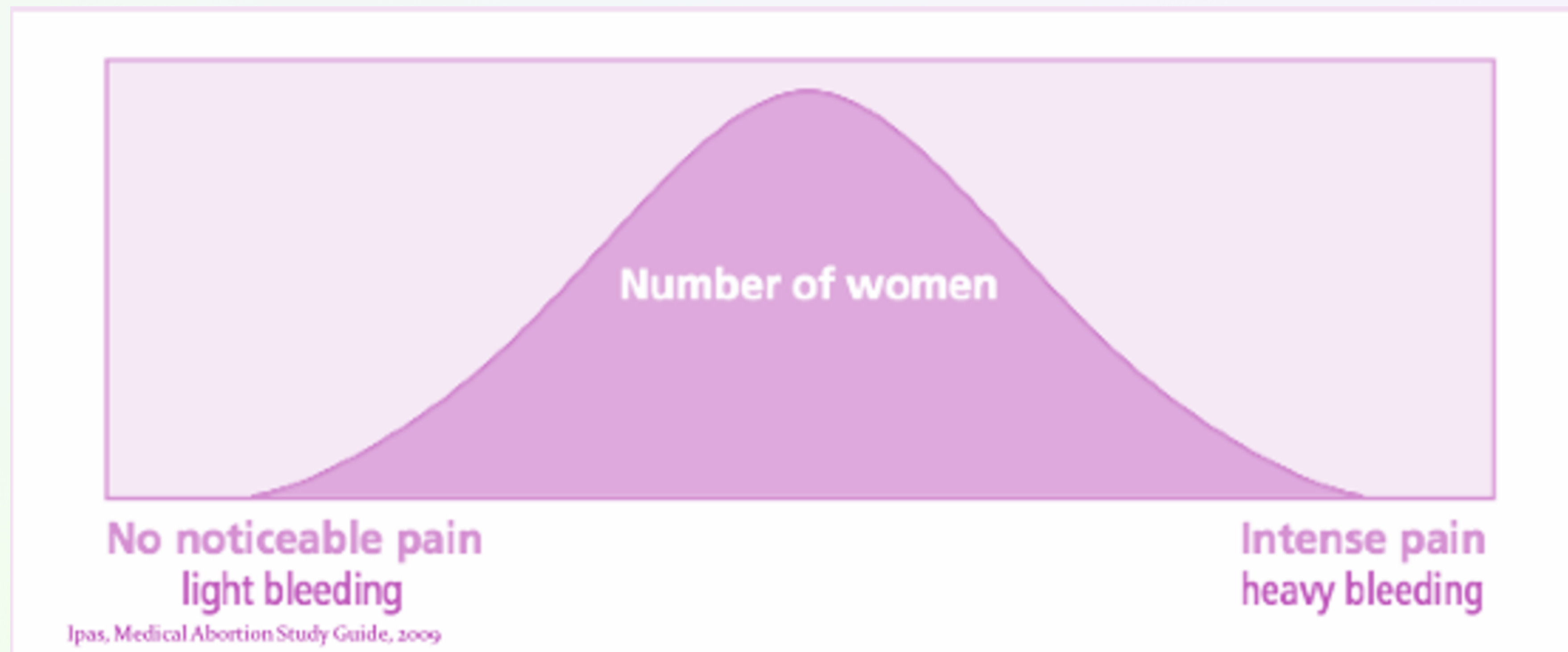
# NORMAL SIDE EFFECTS

- You will cramp and bleed during your abortion. **This is normal** and means that the medication (Misoprostol) is making your uterus contract & remove the pregnancy products. **If you are concerned about cramping** and bleeding, see further section on 'possible complications'.
- You may experience some clotting during your abortion - this is normal. **If you are concerned about clotting**, see further section on 'possible complications'.
- The symptoms you experience will be more acute during the first 24 hours of your abortion and the following day, **you should begin to feel better**, though light bleeding can last for around 3 weeks.
- You should not have penetrative sex or insert anything into your vagina including tampons or sex toys, for at least 5 to 10 days after your abortion.
- Your period may take a few weeks longer to regulate again, **however you can become pregnant again straight away**, so it may be best to take some advice on contraceptives if you are not using these already.



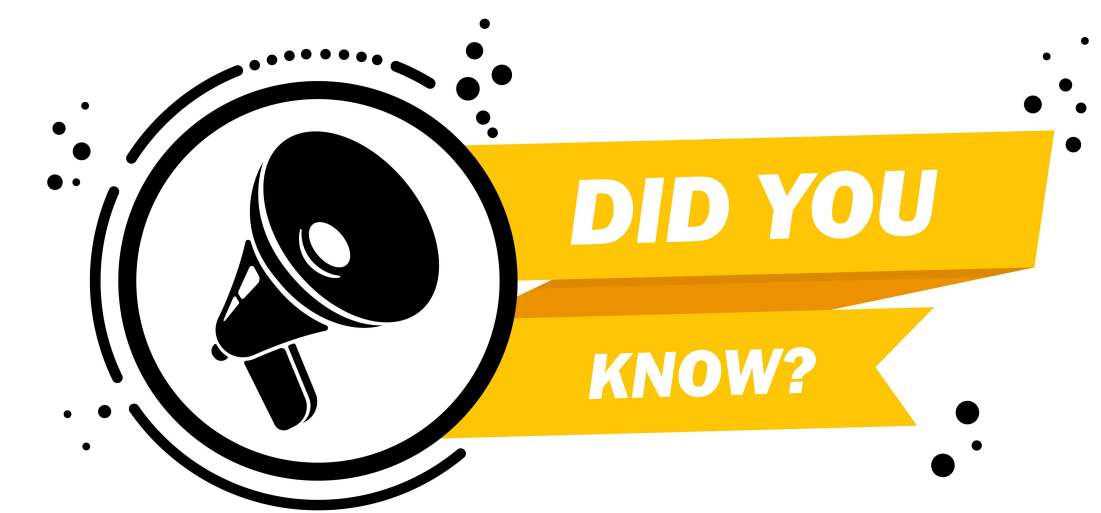
# WHAT TO EXPECT

- The next day after taking the Misoprostol, you should feel well and the heavier bleeding should have stopped, however **light bleeding may last for up to 3 weeks.**





# ARE ABORTION PILLS SAFE?



- Abortion pills are among the safest medication in the world.
- Abortion pills, when used correctly, are safer than many over the counter medications such as paracetamol, aspirin, penicillin and viagra. The World Health Organisation states that medical abortion is a 'simple and common healthcare procedure'. **Removing abortion access or placing barriers in the way of abortion access can make it unsafe.** Otherwise medical abortion is routine, safe and effective healthcare.
- **98%** of medical abortions are effective with no further intervention required.
- **99% of women and people** who took the abortion pill had no complications.
- Abortion is safer than carrying a pregnancy to full term and childbirth.



# ARE ABORTION PILLS SAFE?



- Abortion **DOES NOT** cause breast cancer or any other type of cancer.
- Abortion **DOES NOT** affect your fertility or future ability to become pregnant.
- Abortion **DOES NOT** cause depression.
- Abortion pills at home are **very safe**.
- All types of people have abortions for all types of reasons - **each one is valid, necessary and their own business**.



# FURTHER READING...

- <https://reproductiverights.org/bust-myths-about-abortion/>
- <https://www.msichoice.org.uk/news/blog-smashing-six-abortion-myths/>
- <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/abortion/risks/#:~:text=Surgical abortion,-Before 14 weeks&text=of 1,000 women-,serious complications such as heavy bleeding, damage to the womb,1 out of 1,000 women>
- <https://www2.hse.ie/conditions/abortion/methods/medical/>
- <https://www.plannedparenthood.org/learn/abortion/the-abortion-pill>



# WHAT ARE THE POSSIBLE COMPLICATIONS?

Whilst the risk of complications is very small in early medical abortion with pills, it is important to be aware of any signs. **The main signs of for which you should always seek medical advice and assistance without delay are:**

- Heavy blood loss - whilst your blood loss will be heavy during your abortion, it is important you recognise excessive blood loss. As a guide, excessive blood loss is blood which soaks through your pad and you need to change your pads twice per hour for more than 2 hours
- Large clots which continue for several hours - large meaning bigger than the size of a lemon
- High fever - 39 degrees or more or 38 degrees for over 24 hours
- Severe pain for more than 3 hours
- Vaginal discharge with foul smelling odour



# CONT....

In summary ....





## HOW DO I KNOW THE ABORTION PILLS HAVE WORKED AND THE ABORTION WAS SUCCESSFUL?

- There was bleeding and cramping during the abortion (more than menstruation)
- A change in your body with the loss of pregnancy symptoms
- A pregnancy test 3 weeks after taking the medication - **not before as there may be a false positive due to small traces of pregnancy hormones remaining** and the ability of modern day pregnancy tests to pick up such traces
- An ultrasound scan if you are still unsure or your pregnancy test is positive
- **99 percent of medical abortions are successful**, however if you remain pregnant, you should contact your healthcare provider as you may need to take more medication or have a procedure to end the pregnancy.



# CONT....

In summary ....

Nothing should be put into the vagina for at least 5 days.



When the person decides to have sexual intercourse again, use contraception immediately!

There may be light bleeding for a few days to a few weeks as the uterus empties.



It is important to take a pregnancy test after 3 weeks to make sure the abortion was successful.

Some images courtesy of Hesperian.org



## NEED FURTHER ADVICE...

There are local pro choice support groups, charities and organisations that can help with your abortion healthcare if you need it. **They are always happy for you to contact them.**

<https://www.alliance4choice.com/>

