

Contraceptive Choices – After an Abortion



Your normal fertility returns almost immediately after an abortion. If you want to delay or avoid another pregnancy you should use contraception.

Can I get contraception from my abortion provider?

When you have an abortion, a doctor or nurse at the clinic or hospital should be able to give you information and advice about contraception and usually provide your chosen method.

If they can't give you the method you want, they can tell you where to go to get it. They may also offer you a different method to use for the moment, so that you're still protected from pregnancy.

How soon can I have sex again after an abortion?

- You can have sex when you and a partner feel ready.
- You might have some bleeding and discomfort after your abortion and might prefer to wait until this stops.

How long will the bleeding last?

- Some women bleed for long periods of time and some don't have much bleeding at all.
- Bleeding might be spotting or heavy.
- Bleeding after medical abortion (using pills) can last several weeks.
- If you had a medical abortion and you have no bleeding or very little bleeding, seek advice straight away as this may mean the abortion hasn't worked.
- Bleeding after surgical abortion can last about 2 weeks.
- If you have very heavy bleeding, seek advice straight away.

When will my periods start again?

- Your periods usually return 4–6 weeks after an abortion.
- You can get pregnant before your periods return because ovulation (releasing an egg) happens about 2 weeks before you get your period.
- If you don't have a period within 4–6 weeks of the abortion, see your doctor or clinic as sometimes the pregnancy can continue. This is not common.

Which contraceptive method will be suitable for me?

This depends on what you and a partner prefer, your medical history and whether you had any complications during your abortion.

When should I start contraception after an abortion?

If there were no complications with the abortion and you don't have any conditions or risks that mean you can't use certain methods, then you can start **any method** of contraception immediately and be protected from pregnancy straight away.

If you choose **hormonal contraception** and you start this **more than 5 days after the abortion**, you'll need to use another method of contraception, such as condoms, or avoid sex for:

- 2 days after starting the progestogen-only pill
- 7 days after starting the IUS, contraceptive implant, contraceptive injection, combined pill (except Qlaira), contraceptive patch or contraceptive vaginal ring
- 9 days for the combined pill Qlaira.

If you have an **early medical abortion** (using pills), you can choose to start the contraceptive implant or the contraceptive injection as soon as you've taken the first pill, if you want to. Starting the contraceptive injection at this time might mean you have a slightly higher risk of the abortion not working and the pregnancy continuing.

If you're found to have an infection in your uterus (womb) after the abortion you won't be able to have an IUD or IUS fitted until the infection is gone.

Which methods of contraception are most effective?

Long-acting reversible contraceptives (LARC) are most effective. You don't need to remember to take or use them. The IUS can sometimes help reduce the bleeding you have after an abortion.

- Contraceptive implant – lasts for 3 years. Can be taken out earlier.
- IUD – lasts for 5-10 years depending on type. Can be taken out earlier.
- IUS – lasts for 3-5 years depending on type. Can be taken out earlier.
- Contraceptive injection (Depo-Provera or Sayana Press) – lasts for 13 weeks.

Other methods rely on you remembering to take or use them. They're all effective methods if used according to instructions. But you have to use and think about them regularly or each time you have sex. If they're not used according to instructions every time they're less effective.

- Combined pill
- Contraceptive patch
- Contraceptive vaginal ring
- Progestogen-only pill (POP)
- Condoms (external/male or internal/female)
- Diaphragm or cap
- Natural family planning

If you had the abortion after 13 weeks of pregnancy, wait for 6 weeks before using a diaphragm or cap. If you previously used a diaphragm or cap, check with your doctor or contraception clinic to make sure it still fits.

Natural family planning can be more difficult to learn and use just after an abortion. If you used this before the abortion, ask your natural family planning teacher for advice.

Can I use emergency contraception after an abortion?

If you have sex without contraception or think your method might have failed you should use emergency contraception if you don't want to get pregnant. You can use an emergency pill or an emergency IUD from 5 days after an abortion as long as there were no complications. If you had complications ask a doctor or nurse for advice. You don't need to use emergency contraception earlier than 5 days after an abortion.

Where else to get help

- Get information about abortion, contraception and sexual health at www.fpa.org.uk
- Get information for young people under 25 at www.brook.org.uk
- Find your closest contraception or sexual health clinic at www.fpa.org.uk/clinics
- Find a GP or pharmacy at www.nhs.uk (England), www.nhsdirect.wales.nhs.uk (Wales), www.nhsinform.scot (Scotland) and www.hscni.net (Northern Ireland).

Emergency contraception

If you've had sex without contraception, or think your method might have failed, there are different types of emergency contraception you can use.

- An IUD is the most effective option. It can be fitted up to 5 days after sex, or up to 5 days after the earliest time you could have released an egg (ovulation).
- An emergency contraceptive pill with ulipristal acetate can be taken up to 5 days (120 hours) after sex. Available with a prescription or to buy from a pharmacy. ellaOne is the only brand in the UK.
- An emergency contraceptive pill with levonorgestrel can be taken up to 3 days (72 hours) after sex. More effective the earlier it is taken after sex. Available with a prescription or to buy from a pharmacy. There are a number of different brands.

Emergency pills are available for free from some pharmacies. Age restrictions may apply.

Ask your doctor, nurse or pharmacist about getting emergency pills in advance.

Sexually transmitted infections

Most methods of contraception don't protect you from sexually transmitted infections (STIs). Male (external) and female (internal) condoms, when used correctly and consistently, can help protect against STIs. Avoid using spermicidally lubricated condoms. The spermicide commonly contains a chemical called Nonoxinol 9, which may increase the risk of HIV infection.

For more information about contraceptive choices visit www.fpa.org.uk/contraception

For more information about abortion visit www.fpa.org.uk/abortion

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