

Abortion (Termination)...Your Questions Answered

I am unsure about my pregnancy.....

You are not alone – many women have mixed feelings when they find they are pregnant, even if they have been pregnant before. This is quite normal and understandable. One in three women in the UK will have an abortion by the age of 45 yrs.

Sometimes however there may be special reasons to do with the baby, or with your own health and circumstances or with the health of your existing family, which could make you even more uncertain.

Staff at the Choices clinic, the Orchard Centre or your own G.P. will be pleased to discuss these factors with you in a non – judgmental, unbiased way, and help you make up your own mind on the right decision for your future.

What are my options?

- you may decide to continue with the pregnancy and become a parent; or
- you may decide to continue with the pregnancy and have the child fostered or adopted; or
- you may decide to end the pregnancy with an abortion.

What is an Abortion?

An abortion is the removal of the contents of your womb.

This can be achieved **medically** using tablets or **surgically** using gentle suction. It does not normally involve invasive surgery or stitches. In most cases an abortion has no effect on future pregnancies.

The Abortion (Guernsey) (Amendment) Law 2021 allows termination of pregnancy only in a number of clearly defined circumstances. In every case a medical practitioner must agree that your case is covered by one of the sections of the Guernsey Abortion Law. This can be either the clinic doctors or your GP.

Do I need to see a counsellor?

This is not compulsory. Many women considering abortion are sure of their decision, however other women can find it helpful to talk things through with someone not involved in the situation. A counsellor will help you to talk through your feelings and explore the issues in a non-judgmental and unbiased way. They are not there to make up your mind, but to support you in making your own decision. A partner or friend may come with you.

The counselling service is **free and confidential** and is offered by the Committee for Health and Social Care (HSC) through **Choices** to all Bailiwick residents holding a GY social security number. Counselling is most helpful if accessed beforehand but is also available at any time following the procedure, no matter how much time has passed. The counsellor's confidential 'help line' telephone number is: **07781 138448** or email **therapy@suremail.gg**. Confidential voicemails may also be left on this number.

What next?

If you decide that you wish to proceed with an abortion, it is important to see the Choices doctor or your G.P. as soon as possible to discuss your choices and make sure you are certain of your decision. You will be asked for a **urine sample** to confirm the pregnancy test and a test to check for **STI's** (urine or swab). **Contraception** options for afterwards will be discussed and you may be given medication to start after your procedure or advised to contact us afterwards to book an IUS, IUD or implant fit. Once the doctor has signed the legally required document, you will be referred to see the Gynaecologist. You can take a partner, friend or family member to this appointment.

At the specialist centre you may have a gynaecological examination as well as an ultrasound scan to establish how many weeks pregnant you are. It is helpful to attend this appointment with a full bladder as it makes the scan easier. A routine blood test may also be carried out. The Specialist will then discuss your options which will depend on how many weeks pregnant you are. If you choose a surgical abortion, you may also see the anaesthetist who will check that you are fit for an anaesthetic. If the Specialist feels that you meet requirements of the Guernsey Abortion Law, they will then make the arrangements and complete the legal paperwork.

Abortions of pregnancies over 14 weeks cannot be performed locally and the specialist will facilitate a referral to the UK.

Surgical abortion you will be admitted to the hospital for a procedure to remove the pregnancy and discharged later the same day. Contraception can be started at this point.

Medical abortion takes a little longer as it occurs in 2 stages.

Stage 1: You attend the hospital where you will be given a tablet to block the pregnancy hormones on the ward and asked to stay for approx. 30 minutes to ensure you have no adverse reactions to the medication.

Stage 2: You return to the ward 1-2 days later where you will be given a vaginal pessary (a tablet inserted like a tampon). This causes the pregnancy to be expelled. This may be uncomfortable with some cramping and bleeding. You should allow approx. 4- 6 hours in hospital for this stage.

It is important to start **contraception** at this stage if you do not want to become pregnant again immediately.

You may be given a follow up appointment with the consultant if required.

What are the risks?

There are some slight risks associated with abortion. The main risk is infection; avoiding using tampons or having sex for four weeks can reduce this. If you have a medical abortion there is a small risk of an incomplete abortion, which results in prolonged or heavy bleeding. If this happens it may be necessary to have a small procedure under general anaesthetic to remove the retained products (D&C). There is also a small risk of damage to the womb or cervix. Future fertility is not usually affected.

Will it hurt?

Everyone will experience some discomfort. This differs for each individual but pain relief is available along with treatment for any nausea or vomiting. There can be some diarrhoea with medical abortion medications.

Can I change my mind?

The medical staff will have time to listen to any worries you may have. You can change your mind at any time up until the treatment commences.

When can I go home?

Surgical abortion: You may be able to go home 4 hours after returning to the ward if the doctor and nurses are happy. A friend or relative should accompany you. You will be given a 'help line' number should you need any advice up to 48 hours following discharge.

Medical abortion: You will be able to go home once you have passed the products of conception which can take around 4-6 hours.

How long will I need to take off work?

You should be able to return to work the next day but may need to take it easy. There will be some cramping and bleeding can last for several weeks. You can resume usual activities as soon as you feel comfortable.

When will I be able to have sex again?

You can have sex as soon as you feel comfortable however we advise you to wait at least four weeks to reduce any risk of infection and also to start your **contraception** if you wish to avoid an unwanted pregnancy.

Will I feel guilty about my abortion?

A few women do. You may feel a bit 'low' after your treatment though this generally passes within a few days. You can talk to the free counsellor at any time following the abortion, even weeks or months later, by calling the confidential help line: **07781 138448** or email **therapy@suremail.gg**

CONTRACEPTION

It is very important to think about this before your abortion as fertility returns to normal almost immediately. The Choices doctor or your GP will discuss the different options available and plan for you to start this soon after the procedure so that you will be protected straight away. If possible, please bring your chosen method with you to the hospital and the nurse will advise you when to start.

The following is a brief guide as to what is available:

- **The pill / mini pill / patch / vaginal ring** should be started on the 1st day after your treatment. These methods can also be used for short term cover before an IUD or implant can be fitted.
- **The Injection** can be given at the time of your treatment and lasts 12 weeks.
- **The Implant** is immediately effective if fitted up to 5 days afterwards. Contact us afterwards to book.
- **An IUD or IUS (coil)** can be fitted either within 2 days or after 4 weeks. Contact us afterwards to book.
- **Sterilisation or vasectomy** can be discussed with your doctor or gynaecologist.
- **Condoms** are advisable if there is likely to be a delay starting your ongoing contraception and also to reduce the risk of sexually transmitted infections (STI's).

Emergency contraception can be taken if you have unprotected sex before you have started your contraception. Please see your GP or attend Choices or the Orchard Centre as soon as possible as this needs to be taken as soon as possible. This is also available directly from pharmacies.

Contact Choices, the Orchard Centre or your G.P. (yellow pages) for further information about pregnancy, abortion, contraception and safe sex. Information is also available at www.sexwise.org.uk

Choices: 714954 or 07781 103434 email: info@choices.gg website: www.choices.gg

Private abortion information is available at www.bpas.org, www.msichoice.org.uk or www.nupas.co.uk

The Abortion (Guernsey) (Amendment) Law, 2021

An abortion is only lawful in the Bailiwick if a medical practitioner certifies that:

- It is immediately necessary to save the life of the pregnant woman, or
- It is necessary to prevent serious injury to the physical or mental health of the pregnant woman, or
- The baby has been diagnosed with a serious abnormality, or
- The pregnancy has not exceeded 24 weeks and the continuance of pregnancy would significantly impact the physical or mental health of the pregnant woman or any existing children of her family.