



Position Paper # 20

After Your Abortion

Today, terminating a pregnancy is a safe medical procedure with very few complications. As well as being fully informed about their options and the abortion procedure, women should also know what to expect physically and emotionally after an abortion.

Note: Some of the information in this paper may vary slightly depending on the clinic or hospital. Please contact the clinic or hospital in your area to confirm information, and to obtain more details.

Women who have an abortion in a clinic that uses conscious sedation require very little recovery time and are usually ready to leave within an hour after the procedure. Procedures done in a hospital or under general anesthetic will require a slightly longer recovery time.

Aftercare and Follow-up

Most women feel physically fine very shortly after an abortion and experience few difficulties. Anxiety is greatly reduced when women know what might be experienced and understand the difference between what is normal and what may indicate a need for further medical assistance. Following the abortion, instructions for after care are given to the patient. It is important to follow these instructions and to take any prescriptions given.

A few simple precautions will reduce the risk of infection:

- Wear pads for the first week if still bleeding and avoid putting anything into the vagina. This means no tampons, no vaginal sex and no tub baths. Showers are fine.
- During the second week, tub baths, vaginal sex using condoms, and tampons during the day (pads are recommended at night), are permissible. Avoid swimming and hot tubs for two weeks.

It is possible to get pregnant right after an abortion, so it is important to use adequate birth control at all times.

Most clinics provide a pager number to call if a woman has any concerns in the days following her abortion. If any of the following symptoms are experienced, she should contact the abortion

provider, her family physician or health care professional, or visit the nearest hospital emergency room:

- severe cramps
- chills, or fever of 37.5 degrees or more on two consecutive readings, twelve hours apart
- bleeding that soaks through more than two maxi-pads an hour for more than two hours
- foul-smelling discharge from the vagina
- vomiting or persistent nausea
- continuing symptoms of pregnancy

Emotional Well-Being

Although the most common emotion following an abortion is relief, there may also be feelings of loss or sadness. Mood swings or emotional upsets are also affected by the drop in pregnancy hormones. Some women experience difficulty after an abortion because of the obstacles encountered while trying to obtain abortion care, feeling alone while making an important decision, or living in an environment where abortion is stigmatized. Talking with a caring and supportive person such as a friend, partner, family member, clergy, or someone who gives positive support and does not judge, can be helpful and comforting. If a woman feels the need for professional counseling, she should contact her abortion provider for a referral to a pro-choice counselling service in her community.

Groups opposed to abortion talk a lot about “Post Abortion Stress Syndrome.” This is not an actual psychological condition and is not recognized by any medical or psychological association.