



Abortion Rights
Coalition of Canada

Coalition pour le droit à
l'avortement au Canada

*Your
Voice for Choice*

Canada's only national political pro-choice advocacy group

POB 2663, Station Main, Vancouver, BC, V6B 3W3 • info@arcc-cdac.ca • www.arcc-cdac.ca

Position Paper # 19

All About Your Abortion (*from appointment to recovery*)

This paper discusses the process for surgical and medical abortion (up to about 12 weeks gestation). Details may vary between clinics.

All About Your Surgical Abortion

Making the Appointment

At abortion clinics, you will be treated with respect and dignity from your first phone call to make an appointment for an abortion. You should never feel judgement or be harassed while doing this. (If you encounter problems with your doctor or local hospital, you can make a complaint.¹) You should make the call yourself so that the clinic staff can ask for important personal information that is required for your best medical treatment, such as when your last period was, when you believe you conceived, any disease or illness, etc. It can take one day to several weeks for an appointment depending on both how advanced your pregnancy is, and on the clinic location or appointment availability (e.g., where you live can affect wait times).

The Day of Your Appointment

Clinics provide a friendly, casual atmosphere, and the surroundings are more comfortable than at a hospital. Upon admittance, you will be required to read and complete forms regarding your personal information, medical history, and consent.

You will speak with the clinic's counsellor prior to the procedure. This counselling is called Informed Consent, which means that you will be giving your permission to the doctor to do the procedure and that it is your decision to have the abortion. It is not decision-making counselling,

¹ Every province has a College of Physicians and Surgeons that handle patient complaints. Google your provincial College complaint procedures to make a complaint. For example, here is BC's complaint procedure: <https://www.cpsbc.ca/for-public/faqs/complaints-process>. And Ontario's: <https://www.cpsso.on.ca/Public-Information-Services/Make-a-Complaint>

as you should make your decision before you arrive at the clinic. However, you will also have time to voice concerns and ask questions about the procedure.

Future birth control will also be discussed at this time, sometimes including the option to have an IUD inserted when the abortion is completed.

Next, you will undergo some pre-operative procedures, which may include Rh testing, Hemoglobin testing, blood pressure, temperature, and STI testing among others. You might also have an abdominal exam performed, which could include an ultrasound to determine the gestational age of your pregnancy and to rule out an ectopic pregnancy or other health factors.

For the ultrasound and abortion, you will undress and change into a gown. You will then be ready to undergo the abortion procedure.

The abortion will completely empty the uterus of all pregnancy tissue. The doctor will use a speculum (same instrument used for PAP smears) to gently separate the vaginal walls to see the cervix, the opening of the uterus. The doctor will then clean and freeze the cervix with a local anesthetic. The doctor will gently open the cervical canal with the help of metal dilators; the dilators increase in size, depending on how advanced the pregnancy is. Once dilated, the doctor will put a hollow tube in the uterus. This tube is attached to a vacuum aspirator pump, which will empty the contents of the uterus. Next, a curette is used along the uterine wall to ensure the entire placenta and all fetal tissue has been removed. The suction tube will be used once more to remove the last of the tissue.

The whole procedure normally lasts about eight to ten minutes. Many people describe it as feeling similar to menstrual cramps. Pain pills, or nitrous oxide (laughing gas) may be used to help relieve any cramping sensations. After the procedure, you will be required to stay in the recovery area under a nurse's care. Most patients usually remain about 30-40 minutes and are usually served juice and crackers. The nurse in charge of your care will review instructions on your post-abortion care and bring up any previously-discussed birth control options with you.

All About Your Medication Abortion

Obtaining the Medication

This may be done through a clinic that performs surgical abortions, or you can get a prescription and pick up Mifegymiso from your local pharmacy. You will need to make an appointment with your family doctor, as it may be necessary to receive an ultrasound to determine how far along your pregnancy is. With this ultrasound you will be given a prescription to pick up the pills from a pharmacy. You should never be refused or feel judged or harassed while doing this.²

² Most provinces have a College of Pharmacists that handle patient complaints. Google your provincial College complaint procedures to make a complaint. For example, here is BC's complaint procedure: <http://www.bcpharmacists.org/complaints-process>. And Ontario's: <http://www.ocpinfo.com/protecting-the-public/complaints-reports/>

You will receive more information with this method than when having a surgical abortion, as you will receive information on the contraindications for medication. Topics discussed will include how much bleeding is too much, normal signs and symptoms, proper use and care of the pills, multiple blood draws that will be required, booking of the follow-up, and any other questions or concerns you might have.

Performing the Medication Abortion

You will be given two pills: mifepristone, which causes contractions of the uterus, and misoprostol, which brings on labour and temporarily thins the cervix in preparation to expel the pregnancy.

When you are ready, you will take the first pill, mifepristone, and place it in your mouth between your cheek and your gums (buccal administration), letting it dissolve for 30 minutes, then swallowing any of the pill that remains with water. Then, 24 hours later, you will do exactly the same with your second pill, misoprostol. Within anywhere from 30 minutes to 4 hours later, you could start to experience short-term (on and off through the next 24 hours) effects of the medication such as strong cramping, nausea, vomiting, fever, and chills, as well as bleeding and passing of clots and fetal tissue. It can take up to three days for the pregnancy to pass, depending on how far along you are.

Post-Abortion

It is recommended that you take the day off for the abortion, and in the case of medication abortion, the next day or two if possible. However, many people feel fine the day after a medication abortion, and most people are back to their normal lives within two weeks.

While bleeding, change your pad regularly, and monitor how many pads you bleed through. Two or more pads each hour for over two hours is abnormal. Anything less is normal, as well as clots and fetal tissue up to the size of a lemon. If you feel generally unwell, or have strong persistent symptoms for six or more consecutive hours, you should call your abortion provider, emergency contact, or go to an emergency room.

Two weeks after your abortion, you may want to have a follow-up appointment with your family doctor or local sexual health clinic to determine that the abortion was a success, especially if you're not feeling completely well. They will rule out such things as a failed abortion or infection. They may take blood work, perform an ultrasound, and talk about how you're feeling.