

Does having an abortion hurt? ^[1]

Alice,

Ok, straight up, do abortions hurt and what are the risks?

Answer

Dear Reader,

As valid as your question is, there unfortunately is not one "straight up" answer. The reason is that there are different types of abortions that are performed at different times, depending on how far along the woman is in pregnancy and which method she prefers. Abortions performed by trained medical professionals are very safe; however any medical procedure carries some risk, including the risk of possible discomfort or pain. A woman's overall health may impact her risk of complications; if you're considering an abortion your health care provider will discuss your personal medical history and any risks that apply to you. First trimester abortion is less risky than carrying a pregnancy or going through childbirth — in the United States, the risk of death associated with childbirth is about 10 times as high as the risk associated with all abortions.

As far as pain, local or general anesthetic is used for surgical abortions, however, some women do describe a feeling of uncomfortable "pressure" and/or pain similar to menstrual cramps. Women are likely to experience some pain after the procedure as well. Many women describe the pain as being similar to menstrual cramps and usually treat symptoms with regular ibuprofen or by applying heat: a warm bath, a heating pad, or a hot water bottle. Aside from physical pain, some women experience strong emotions related to abortion. Most women report feeling relief after the procedure; however some feel anger, regret, guilt, or sadness. Hormonal changes resulting from terminating a pregnancy may intensify these feelings; for this reason it's sometimes helpful to talk with a partner, trusted friend, or a counselor following an abortion to discuss and process feelings.

There are two major categories of abortion procedures, medication and surgical:

Medication abortion using mifepristone and misoprostol pills — performed up to 63 days after gestation, medication abortion is 97 percent effective. The medications, taken at home, block pregnancy hormones and induce the uterus to expel the fetus (similar to what happens during a

naturally-occurring miscarriage). Misoprostol causes cramping and heavy bleeding as it expels the contents of the uterus, and may also cause nausea and fever.

Surgical abortion (aspiration, dilation & evacuation) — performed between 6 to 21 weeks gestation (90 percent of all abortions are performed before 16 weeks gestation using the aspiration method). Common side effects include cramping, nausea, sweating, and feeling faint. Less common side effects are heavy or prolonged bleeding, blood clots, damage to the cervix or uterus, or infection. The side-effects listed here can be more severe or prolonged the later in a pregnancy that an abortion is performed. After 24 weeks gestation, abortions are only performed for serious health reasons and generally require admission to a hospital.

Medication abortions usually take 4 to 5 hours to completely expel the contents of the uterus. Surgical abortions usually last between 10 and 30 minutes, however women may be required to stay at the clinic or hospital between one and five hours afterward for recovery, depending on the procedure. Having a safe, uncomplicated abortion (either medication or surgical) should not impact future fertility or childbearing.

If you or someone you care about is considering an abortion, check out the Related Q&A below for more information. More detailed descriptions of the different abortion procedures are available from [Planned Parenthood](#) [2]. Hopefully these resources will help you have a full understanding of the different experiences women have and the types of abortion.

Alice!

Category:

[Sexual & Reproductive Health](#) [3]

[Pregnancy Options](#) [4]

Related questions

[Abortion after the first trimester?](#) [5]

[The abortion pill \(mifepristone\)](#) [6]

[Effects of multiple abortions](#) [7]

Resources

[Medical Services \(Morningside\)](#) [8]

[Medical Services \(CUIMC\)](#) [9]

Published date:

Aug 01, 2008

Last reviewed on:

Jul 03, 2015

Footer menu

▼ [Contact Alice!](#)

◦ [Content Use](#)

- [Media Inquiries](#)
- [Comments & Corrections](#)
- ▼ [Syndication & Licensing](#)
 - [Licensing Q&As](#)
 - [Get Alice! on Your Website](#)
 - [Full Site Syndication](#)
 - [Link to Go Ask Alice!](#)

Go Ask Alice! is not an emergency or instant response service.

If you are in an urgent situation, please [visit our Emergency page](#) to view a list of 24 hour support services and hotlines.

Source URL: <https://goaskalice.columbia.edu/answered-questions/does-having-abortion-hurt>

Links

- [1] <https://goaskalice.columbia.edu/answered-questions/does-having-abortion-hurt>
- [2] <http://www.plannedparenthood.org/health-topics/abortion/abortion-procedures-4359.htm>
- [3] <https://goaskalice.columbia.edu/category/sexual-reproductive-health>
- [4] <https://goaskalice.columbia.edu/category/pregnancy-options>
- [5] <https://goaskalice.columbia.edu/answered-questions/abortion-after-first-trimester>
- [6] <https://goaskalice.columbia.edu/answered-questions/abortion-pill-mifepristone-0>
- [7] <https://goaskalice.columbia.edu/answered-questions/effects-multiple-abortions>
- [8] <https://goaskalice.columbia.edu/resource/medical-services-morningside>
- [9] <https://goaskalice.columbia.edu/resource/medical-services-cuimc>