

Signs of early pregnancy and abortion info ^[1]

Dear Alice,

How much time after one gets pregnant can they feel the side effects (such as morning sickness)? Within how many months of the pregnancy can one get an abortion?

Thanks.

— Worried for a friend

Answer

Dear Worried for a friend,

If your friend is concerned that she may be pregnant the only sure way to find out is to get a pregnancy test. However, a woman can sometimes tell she is pregnant in the first few weeks just by monitoring her symptoms. Symptoms that might begin during the first weeks of pregnancy include:

- Sore breasts
- Fatigue
- Spotting (menstrual blood between periods)
- Abdominal cramps
- Nausea and potentially vomiting
- Headaches
- Food cravings or aversions
- Slight fever
- Change in moods
- Constipation

Keep in mind that many of these symptoms can be associated with other things like having a cold, or stomach virus and that symptoms vary by individual. The only way to know for sure is to get a pregnancy test. Some pregnancy tests can be used as soon as a few days before your friend's next expected period. These tests are even more effective if used once your friend has missed a period. You can buy a home pregnancy test at a drug store or pharmacy (be sure to follow the directions exactly). You can also make an appointment with your health care provider

to confirm a pregnancy.

If your friend is indeed pregnant, she has some options and some decisions to make. You may find you can be most helpful to her by helping her understand her options and listening to her feelings. First of all, she can either continue the pregnancy or terminate (that is, have an abortion). If she decides to continue the pregnancy, then she can either keep the baby or opt for adoption. For more information about continuing a pregnancy and adoption, check out the [Pregnancy Options](#) ^[2] category in the *Go Ask Alice!* archives.

If your friend decides to have an abortion, there are a number of methods that may be available to her, and these depend primarily on how far along she is (i.e., how many weeks into the pregnancy). The procedure is safest when it's performed earlier on in the pregnancy. Most abortions are performed during the first twelve weeks of pregnancy (twelve weeks after fertilization). The different types of abortions include:

- Medical abortion (taking a combination of prescription pills to induce miscarriage) may be done within 63 days (or nine weeks) after the first day of a woman's last period. Some states limit the amount of time to 49 days.
- Aspiration (performed by a health care provider using a suction device) may be used up to 16 weeks after the first missed period.
- Dilation and evacuation procedure (using medication or dilators to open the cervix and a suction device to remove contents of the uterus) is typically used when more than 16 weeks have passed since the last period.

If your friend's concern over pregnancy risk was due to recently (within the last few days) having unprotected sex or a condom that broke or slipped off during sex, she may want to consider emergency contraception (EC), sometimes called the [morning after pill](#) ^[3]. Depending on the type of EC, it can be taken up to 120 hours (five days) after unprotected sex, although it is more effective when taken as soon as possible. Emergency contraception works to prevent a pregnancy from occurring (thus the reason for taking it as soon as possible), if your friend is already pregnant and takes EC, it won't work.

Whatever your friend chooses, it will be the right decision for her at this time. She is fortunate to have someone like you to support her.

Alice!

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