

# Surgical Abortion

# Surgical Abortion

What are the differences between surgical and medical abortions?

	<b>Surgical abortion</b>	<b>Medical abortion</b>
How it works	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• A doctor will gently open your cervix (the opening to the uterus or womb) with dilators that gradually get bigger.</li><li>• A cannula (straw-like tube) is inserted through the cervix into the uterus.</li><li>• Suction (like a vacuum) is used to remove the pregnancy from the uterus.</li><li>• The procedure usually takes 3-10 minutes.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• You take two medications. The pregnancy will end and the uterus will push out the tissue (like a miscarriage).</li><li>• The first pill stops the pregnancy. The second pills are taken 24-48 hours (1-2 days) later, at a convenient time for you.</li></ul>
Advantages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Very low risk of continuing pregnancy (less than 1 in 100).</li><li>• High success rate (about 99%).</li><li>• Only needs one clinic visit.</li><li>• Procedure is finished within minutes.</li><li>• Sedation can be used if you wish.</li><li>• Can be used early or later in pregnancy.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• High success rate (95-98%).</li><li>• The pregnancy is expelled (pushed out of the body) within 24 hours of using misoprostol in 90% of women.</li><li>• It is more private, since it is done at home.</li><li>• You can choose to have someone with you for support.</li><li>• Can be used very early in pregnancy.</li><li>• Similar to a natural miscarriage or a heavy menstrual period.</li></ul>

	<b>Surgical abortion</b>	<b>Medical abortion</b>
<b>Disadvantages</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Medical instruments enter the uterus.</li> <li>• May feel less private.</li> <li>• You can't have someone with you for support, as partners and loved ones are not allowed in the clinic.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Uterine cramping may be very painful.</li> <li>• About 2-5% of women will need a uterine aspiration procedure (D&amp;C) after medical abortion.</li> <li>• Bleeding after medical abortion may last longer than after uterine aspiration.</li> <li>• You may see blood clots and pregnancy tissue.</li> <li>• Needs 2 clinic visits.</li> <li>• You may not know if the abortion was successful until the followup appointment 1-2 weeks later.</li> <li>• Risk of continued pregnancy is 1 in 20.</li> </ul>

## **What is a surgical abortion?**

A surgical abortion uses suction to remove pregnancy tissue during a very short procedure, as described in the table above.

## **Am I eligible for a surgical abortion?**

A surgical abortion may be performed if your pregnancy is up to 15 weeks and 6 days from the first day of your last menstrual period.

## **What happens during a surgical abortion?**

**If your pregnancy is between 6 to 12 weeks:**

- The doctor will gently open your cervix (the opening to the uterus or womb) with dilators that gradually get bigger.
- Once the cervix is open, the doctor will insert a hollow straw-like tube (called a cannula) which is attached to an aspirator. This machine uses gentle suction (like a vacuum) to clean out the contents of the uterus, including the fetus and placenta.

- The doctor will then use a spoon-shaped instrument (called a curette) to check the walls of the uterus for any tissue that may remain. The procedure takes about 5 to 10 minutes.

### **If your pregnancy is between 13 weeks to 15 weeks and 6 days:**

- You will be given a medication called misoprostol before the procedure. Misoprostol softens the cervix and makes dilation (opening the cervix) easier.
- Misoprostol takes 1½-2 hours to work. After this, you will have the procedure described above, which will last about 5-15 minutes.

### **What are the possible risks?**

- Infection may occur in 0.1-2% of cases. You will be given antibiotics to help prevent this.
- There is a very low risk (less than 1 in 1000) of:
  - › injury to your uterus
  - › remaining tissue requiring a second aspiration
  - › excessive bleeding

Please see the pamphlet, *After Your Procedure*, for more information:  
[www.nshealth.ca/patientinformation/1509](http://www.nshealth.ca/patientinformation/1509)

**What are your questions? Please ask. We are here to help you.**  
**In Nova Scotia you can call 811 to talk with a registered nurse about your health care questions 24/7.**

#### **Looking for more health information?**

Find this pamphlet and all our patient resources here: <http://library.nshealth.ca/PatientGuides>

Contact your local public library for books, videos, magazines, and other resources.

For more information, go to <http://library.novascotia.ca>

Connect with a registered nurse in Nova Scotia any time: call 811 or visit <https://811.novascotia.ca>

Learn about other programs and services in your community: call 211 or visit <http://ns.211.ca>

*Nova Scotia Health Authority promotes a smoke-free, vape-free, and scent-free environment.*

*Please do not use perfumed products. Thank you!*

**Nova Scotia Health Authority**

[www.nshealth.ca](http://www.nshealth.ca)

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The information in this pamphlet is to be updated every 3 years or as needed.