

# Early Medical Abortion

This is a guide for your Early medical abortion (EMA)  
during COVID-19 restrictions

## What is an early medical abortion?

Medication abortion involves the use of two medications to terminate your pregnancy. It is performed without the need for surgery. It is safe and effective if performed before 9 weeks of pregnancy. Millions of women around the world have had medication abortions.

The two medications are called mifepristone and misoprostol which cause you to abort your pregnancy in a similar way to a miscarriage. Research shows the medication is most effective when taken 24-48 hours apart.

## What medications are used?

- Mifepristone

This is a medication that prevents the hormone progesterone from maintaining the pregnancy. It also softens and dilates the entrance to the womb (cervix) and prepares the womb (uterus) for the actions of the second medication misoprostol.

- Misoprostol

This is a medication that helps the pregnancy tissue to come away from the wall of the womb (uterus). It causes uterine contractions which lead to the expulsion of pregnancy tissue. It is recommended to be taken a day after mifepristone.

**Note:** Medicines are registered in New Zealand for a specific purpose. Misoprostol is not registered in New Zealand for therapeutic abortion. It is however a very safe drug, extensive research has been done internationally, and it is used in many aspects of women's health care including abortion procedures.

## What is the process if I have a medication abortion?

Firstly, you will either need to be referred by your Doctor or self-refer to Epsom Day Unit (EDU) by phoning 09 630740. Your Doctor or EDU staff will assist with organising an ultrasound to determine your pregnancy gestation, and antenatal bloods and swabs.

Your pregnancy will need to be 9 weeks and 0 days gestation or less to meet EDU's criteria for a medical abortion.

When either your doctor's referral arrives; or the results of your tests are back, an EDU staff nurse will call you as soon as possible to do a phone consultation or book a time that is convenient to have a phone consultation by the nurse or social worker. The nurse/social worker will help you explore your pregnancy options. If you are undecided on your decision, we can book you for a pregnancy options counselling appointment.

Next, you will be booked to have a phone consultation with a doctor who will check your health history to ensure it is safe for you to have a medical abortion. If it is safe to have a medical abortion and you have provided verbal consent for the abortion, the nurse will ring you back to book one visit to Epsom Day Unit.

On this visit you will:

- Provide photo identification to the receptionist
- Take the first day tablet mifepristone
- Have a blood test to get a baseline test for your pregnancy hormone
- Pick up other medication / forms to help you complete the abortion in 1-2 days
  - Misoprostol
  - Pain relief
  - Anti-nausea medication
  - A lab form for a second blood test - The blood tests will tell us whether the abortion medication has worked or if you need some follow-up monitoring / treatment.

It is important you are sure about your decision before taking mifepristone. It is not advisable to continue the pregnancy after taking mifepristone as there are risks of birth defects.

### **Can I bring a support person?**

During COVID-19 level 4-lockdown there are no visitors allowed inside the hospital building. We kindly ask you to leave your support persons in the car waiting for your return from EDU.

### **Can I access contraception at Epsom Day Unit?**

Without effective contraception it is possible to get pregnant immediately after your abortion. If you are requiring or considering contraceptive options please discuss this with the doctor. The contraceptive implant (Jadelle), contraceptive pills and condoms can be prescribed for you on the day.

If you are requesting an intrauterine device (Copper IUD or Mirena) we can refer you to one of our clinics when your bleeding has stopped (as early as 2 weeks). Referrals may be delayed due to the sanctions of COVID-19, it is advisable you have an alternative contraception option to cover you until this appointment.

## What can I expect after taking the first medication (mifepristone)?

- Most women feel completely well for the next 12 hours
- Some women will experience side effects from the medication
- Some women will experience light bleeding and/or mild abdominal cramping
- A few (3 in 100 women) will pass the pregnancy tissue after mifepristone.

## What can I expect after taking the second medication (misoprostol)?

- Women will experience bleeding that is heavier and uterine cramping that is stronger than a normal period. Some lower back pain may also occur.
- Side effects of misoprostol include nausea and/or vomiting (20%) and diarrhoea (2%)
- The peak of pain and bleeding occurs with the passage of the pregnancy tissue. Pain relief is advised before the cramping becomes too severe.
- Most women will pass the pregnancy tissue within 4-6 hours of taking the second medication (misoprostol)
- Along with fresh blood flow and blood clots, you are expected to pass the pregnancy tissue which is a pale colour. This will mostly pass into the toilet and you may not notice it.
- Light bleeding can continue for up to 3 weeks
- Pregnancy symptoms such as breast tenderness, morning sickness and abdominal bloating will often subside within a few days.
- Your next period will likely arrive 4- 6 weeks after your abortion.

**Please follow the EDU misoprostol instruction sheet on the day you are taking these tablets. This will be supplied to you on your visit to Epsom Day Unit.**

## What do I need to do before taking the misoprostol at home?

- Get your prescription for pain relief and anti-nausea medications. We recommend these to start ONE HOUR before you take the misoprostol on day 2
- Make sure you have a good supply of sanitary pads at home.
  - **Do not use tampons.**
- Know your emergency plan.
- We recommend you have an adult at home with you and that you or your support person can speak English so we can provide assistance if needed.
- Have access to a telephone readily available to contact the EDU afterhours service for help or advice, or to call 111 in an emergency.

There are four misoprostol tablets in your pack. You will be required to take all four at once. Moisten your mouth first with some water. Then place the tablets between your cheek and gums (2 on each lower or upper side of the mouth. Let them dissolve inside your mouth (against your cheek) for up to 30 minutes then swallow. During the dissolving process of the tablets; it is best not to swallow or chew as this may result in more side effects (nausea and diarrhoea).

## How will I know the abortion has been complete?

The repeat blood test is used for us to determine if the abortion has been complete. You will be contacted and informed of your result and to also assess any ongoing symptoms you may have.

Further visits to EDU may be necessary if the abortion is not completed (2-5%), Occasionally repeat medication, further blood tests and/or surgery may be required.

## Can complications happen?

Complications can occur; however, these are not common and usually not serious. They can require further visit(s) to EDU or your local hospital for treatment.

- **Retained pregnancy tissue:**  
2-5% chance, for some women the uterus does not contract as it should and tissue and blood clot are left inside. If this happens you might have cramping for longer with bleeding worsening over 24-48 hours. You can contact EDU nursing line for advice Monday to Friday 7.30-1600hours or the on-call nurse for after hours and weekends (a phone number will be provided to you).
- **Infection in the uterus (womb):**  
1% chance: Antibiotics may be required
- **Haemorrhage: <1% chance**  
Exceptionally heavy bleeding that requires emergency surgery (suction curettage) or possibly a blood transfusion. In this case, call 111, or have a support person to take you to hospital immediately.
- **Birth defects**  
There is a 1:200 chance of birth defects only if your pregnancy continues. It is important that you are clear about your decision to choose abortion before you take the medication.
- **Continuing pregnancy**  
There is less than 1:100 chance of a continuing pregnancy after abortion medications. This will be picked up on your follow up blood test result, so it is very important this blood test is completed.

## Feelings and emotions after your abortion

Some women often feel a sense of relief after the abortion; others have a feeling of sadness which can be immediate or days to weeks later. Women may experience a sense of loss and grief. Some women who choose abortion feel guilty about expressing the grief that may follow.

Dealing with your feelings can take time and there is no right or wrong way to move through this process. Set aside time to think about your experience and what it means. If you feel you are going over and over it, talk to a counsellor or friend to help move forward in your life.

Whatever your emotions the most important aspect is to be able to talk about your experience. We encourage you to find a safe place to talk and share your stories with people who are supportive and understanding.

During and following any significant experience in your life you are likely to reflect on yourself, your relationships, your life and goals. This is a normal and healthy response to a life event. To get support around your feelings and emotions we have social work counsellors available, you can call EDU to arrange a counselling phone call appointment during opening hours on (09) 630 0740 – option 4.

Another good resource is: [www.abortionconversation.com](http://www.abortionconversation.com)

## How can we best contact you?

It is essential we have a reliable phone contact number for you. So, we can call you around 3pm on the day that you chose to take the misoprostol to check your progression. Sometimes a nurse may need to call you the following morning to ensure your symptoms indicate a successful abortion, or we may organise you to return to the clinic for assessment and another dose of medication.

## **If you need to contact us**

Epsom Day Unit (EDU): Monday-Friday 0730-1600: (09) 631 0740

If it is the day you have taken your misoprostol, please follow instructions you have been given for the nurse on duty after hours

## **Emergency services:**

**If you think you have an emergency call 111 for an ambulance, or go to your nearest hospital.**