

Having an abortion in North Devon

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There are two types of abortion: medical and surgical. Medical abortion can be carried out up to 9 weeks of pregnancy. This is counted as the time since the first day of your last normal period. Surgical abortions can be carried out from 7 to 12 weeks of pregnancy. After this period a different type of medical termination can be carried out at North Devon District Hospital (NDDH). If you were more than 17 weeks and less than 20 weeks pregnant you would be referred out of the area for the procedure.

Sometimes it can be difficult to tell how pregnant you are and you will always have an ultrasound scan to determine your exact dates.

Early medical abortion (up to nine weeks of pregnancy)

Early medical abortion (sometimes called EMA) involves taking drugs to cause an early miscarriage. It does not involve surgery or an anaesthetic and you will need three appointments. The first is an assessment – the abortion will not be carried out at this visit. You will need two more appointments on two separate days. You should be able to carry out your usual activities between appointments.

At the second appointment, you will be given a tablet (called mifepristone) to swallow. This blocks the pregnancy hormone that is necessary for the pregnancy to continue. It is very unlikely that the abortion will occur after taking only the mifepristone, but very occasionally it can happen. Some women change their mind about the abortion after they have taken mifepristone. Although studies so far do not show that mifepristone is associated with any risks of foetal abnormality, women are advised to continue with the abortion once they have taken mifepristone. You will be given a 24-hour contact telephone number in case you are worried or would like to talk to someone at any time.

At the third visit (one or two days later) you will be given prostaglandin tablets, (called misoprostol or gemeprost). Misoprostol can be used in the vagina or taken by mouth; gemeprost can only be used in the vagina. This causes the uterus (womb) lining to break down and you will start to bleed. You may feel cramping pains similar to period pains; you will be offered pain-relieving drugs. The pregnancy is lost with the bleeding just like a miscarriage. This normally happens 4-6 hours after using the prostaglandin tablets.

Vacuum aspiration from 7-15 weeks of pregnancy

Vacuum aspiration (sometimes called suction abortion) involves a small tube being inserted into the vagina, through the cervix (entrance to the uterus) and into the uterus to remove the pregnancy by suction. To make this easier, tablets containing misoprostol are sometimes inserted into the vagina before the procedure is carried out to help soften the cervix. To reduce any discomfort or pain during the abortion there is a choice of pain relief. A local anaesthetic can be injected into the cervix or you can have a light general anaesthetic so you are asleep during the procedure. Vacuum aspiration takes about 5-10 minutes. You will usually go home on the same day, a few hours after the abortion has been carried out.

Where can I get an abortion?

You can be referred to NDDH for an abortion. You will be given the next available appointment and where possible they will provide your preferred method of abortion. If there is a long waiting list it may be possible to refer you to the Royal Devon and Exeter hospital (RD&E) for an earlier appointment. You will need to be referred by a doctor, which can be either your own GP or a doctor at this clinic.

Alternatively you can self-refer to Marie Stopes. If you are registered with a GP locally, you will not be charged. The advantage of going to Marie Stopes is that you can often get seen quite quickly. The disadvantage is that you need to travel to either Exeter or Bristol. For more information, visit their website www.mariestopes.org.uk or call 0345 300 8090.

Counselling

If you are undecided about your final decision or would like some extra support before or after the abortion there is counselling available from your abortion provider.

Contraception

It is possible to get pregnant immediately after an abortion and so it is important to have made a decision about your contraception prior to your abortion. For more information about the options available, go to our website: www.devonsexualhealth.nhs.uk or visit one of our clinics.

INFORMATION DURING COVID-19

It is still possible to access an abortion as above during the current pandemic. In some cases it may be possible to access services and to get pills prescribed remotely. For more information, contact your GP or Devon Sexual Health. Alternatively, you can contact Marie Stopes directly.

PALS

The Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) ensures that the NHS listens to patients, relatives, carers and friends, answers questions and resolves concerns as quickly as possible. If you have a query or concern call 01271 314090 or email ndht.pals@nhs.net. You can also visit the PALS and Information Centre in person at North Devon District Hospital, Barnstaple.

Have your say

Northern Devon Healthcare NHS Trust aims to provide high quality services. However, please tell us when something could be improved. If you have a comment or compliment about a service or treatment, please raise your comments with a member of staff or the PALS team in the first instance.

'Care Opinion' comments forms are on all wards or online at www.careopinion.org.uk.

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