## Abortion intentionally ends a pregnancy and is legal in Victoria.



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| Abortion procedure - surgical |
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## Surgical abortion is a way you can intentionally end a pregnancy

The first step is to book an appointment for a medical consultation. During this consultation the doctor will:

* confirm if this procedure is suitable for you
* explain the process of having a surgical abortion
* arrange ultrasound and blood tests as required
* give you a consent form to sign if you are going ahead
* make the arrangements for the abortion

In some clinics the abortion procedure takes place the same day of the consultation; in others, on a different day.

## Preparing for a surgical abortion

* Don’t smoke, eat or drink (not even water) for about six hours before the operation. This is for your safety when you have an anaesthetic.
* Plan to be at the clinic for at least a few hours.
* Bring:
  + - sanitary pads
    - your referral letter (if required)
    - your Medicare card
    - your health care card (if relevant), and
    - anything else the clinic has requested.
* Arrange to have someone to take you home.

## Anaesthetic for a surgical abortion

Depending on the clinic, anaesthesia for the procedure may involve:

* a general anaesthetic – you are not conscious during the procedure
* nitrous oxide gas – for a ‘twilight sleep’ (where you are awake, but sedated and calm)
* local anaesthetic – anaesthetic is injected into your cervix to make the area numb, or
* local anaesthetic with sedation.

## Surgical abortion procedure

Most surgical abortion procedures are performed using ‘suction (vacuum) aspiration’ and usually take less than 15 minutes.

The procedure is as follows:

* Your cervix opening is gradually widened.
* A slim tube is then inserted into your uterus.
* The pregnancy is withdrawn with gentle suction.
* An instrument called a curette is used to check if the uterus is empty.

## After a surgical abortion

To reduce the risk of infection, for two weeks after your procedure (or a few days after bleeding has stopped):

* Shower instead of taking a bath.
* Avoid sexual intercourse
* Avoid swimming.
* Use sanitary pads instead of tampons.

## When to seek medical advice after an abortion

You will have a routine follow up appointment a few weeks later with your doctor.

See your clinic, GP or a hospital emergency department immediately if:

* your bleeding becomes heavy
* you develop a fever
* you experience severe cramping or abdominal (tummy) pain.

## Side effects and complications of a surgical abortion

Complications are rare but occur in around three per cent of surgical abortions. Abortions performed in the first trimester, which is when most surgical abortions are performed, have fewer complications.

### Serious complications of surgical abortion are uncommon, but can include the following:

| Complications | Symptoms or side effects | What needs to be done |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Haemorrhage (very heavy bleeding; may indicate the abortion is not complete) | * Bleeding that fills more than two large pads an hour for more than two hours. * Passing blood clots, the size of a small lemon. * Feeling weak or faint. | * Seek urgent medical attention. * Call 000 for an ambulance or go to your nearest hospital emergency department (do not drive yourself, have someone take you). * May be treated with suction curettage of the uterus. * May require blood transfusion (this is rare). |
| **Infection** | Possible:   * cramping or abdominal (tummy) pain * abnormal vaginal discharge * fever * heavy bleeding * tiredness * diarrhoea * vomiting. | * Seek immediate medical attention * See your clinic, GP or a hospital emergency department immediately to be treated with antibiotics |
| **Injury to the uterus**  This is very rare because surgical abortions are undertaken by experienced surgeons | * Identified by the surgeon. | * It will be recognised and treated straight away by the surgeon |
| **Injury to or weakening of the cervix**  This is very rare because surgical abortions are undertaken by experienced surgeons | * This may cause problems in future pregnancies. | * During future pregnancies your gynaecologist will provide advice |

## More Information

This fact sheet is one of three fact sheets about abortion on the Health Translations Directory. Please also see:

* Abortion procedure – medication.
* Abortion.

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