



## MEDICAL TERMINATION OF PREGNANCY Information

A medication abortion is one which is caused by administration of medications, rather than by a surgical suction procedure. There are two methods of medication abortion available in Canada; either a combination of the medications mifepristone and misoprostol or methotrexate and misoprostol. Since it became available in 2017, the mifepristone/misoprostol combination (called “Mifegymiso”) is the more commonly used method, however depending on your circumstances your healthcare team may recommend methotrexate/misoprostol instead.

In order to have a medication abortion, you must be generally healthy and able to come for at least two and possibly three visits to the clinic (generally at one week intervals). If you are unable to do this, or if you have certain medical conditions, or are breastfeeding, your team may recommend a surgical termination of pregnancy.

### Medications

Mifepristone is a medication that blocks the action of progesterone in your body. Progesterone is necessary to sustain early pregnancy. By blocking it, mifepristone causes the uterus to “let go” of the pregnancy. Mifepristone is approved and known to be safe and effective up to 11 weeks of pregnancy. Most women do not experience any side effects from mifepristone. Some women start to have bleeding after this medication, before taking the second medication.

Methotrexate blocks growth and division of cells in the body, including the growth of pregnancy tissue. It is used to treat a variety of conditions, including arthritis and ectopic (tubal) pregnancies. It is used “off-label” for medical abortion. About half of people who receive one dose of methotrexate will experience some side effects, but these are usually mild and short-lived, about 1-2 days. Side effects may include nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, and headache. Less commonly people may experience dizziness, sleepiness, mouth sores, or temporary hair loss. Permanent or severe side effects are not known to occur with the single dose of methotrexate used in abortion.

Misoprostol is a type of medication called a prostaglandin. It is commonly used to prevent stomach ulcers, but also causes softening of the cervix and contraction of the muscles of the uterus. Because of this, it is used “off-label” for medical abortions as well as for treatment of bleeding after deliveries. When taken after mifepristone or methotrexate, it will cause the uterus to contract and push out the pregnancy tissue. After taking misoprostol, people should expect bleeding and cramping. Other common side effects are nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, fever and chills, fatigue, and dizziness; these usually last from a few hours to a couple of days, and are rarely severe.

*All of these medications cause damage to the embryo or fetus. If the medication abortion does not work, a surgical abortion must be performed to prevent the birth of a severely deformed infant. It is very important that any person starting a medical abortion keep their follow-up visits to ensure that the procedure has been successful.*

*There is no evidence that any of these medications harm future pregnancies.*

### Effectiveness

Medication abortion is effective at ending a pregnancy 90-98% of the time. The mifepristone combination is slightly more effective than methotrexate. After starting a medication abortion, about 1% of women will require a surgical procedure because the pregnancy continues to grow (the medical abortion has failed), 2% because of heavy bleeding, and 3-5% because they get tired of waiting for the pregnancy tissue to pass.



### **Is Medication Abortion the right choice for you?**

Whether you have a medication abortion is a personal choice, but there are some things that your healthcare team will consider when discussing whether it is a safe choice for you.

- You must be comfortable and certain about your decision to have an abortion
- You must be early in the pregnancy, no more than 11 weeks as determined by ultrasound or dates
- You must be in good general health, and have normal results of some basic bloodwork
- You must be able to understand the information provided to you about the possible benefits and risks of a medical abortion
- You must be willing to tolerate heavy bleeding, moderate to severe cramping, and the possibility of seeing the pregnancy tissue, which usually looks like a white or pinkish-grey clot
- You must be willing to avoid sex and alcohol until after the abortion is complete
- If you use methotrexate in your medical abortion, you must be willing to avoid vitamin supplements, citrus fruits and juices (orange, grapefruit, etc), and leafy green vegetables for one week
- You must be willing to come back for at least one follow-up visit; sometimes two or three follow-up visits and labwork are required
- You must be willing to have a surgical abortion if the medical abortion is unsuccessful

### **Possible benefits of a Medication Abortion**

- Greater than 90% chance of avoiding a surgical procedure, which means avoiding the chances of damage to the inside of the uterus that can rarely happen with a surgery
- Can be offered earlier in the pregnancy than a surgical abortion
- You can have your abortion in the privacy of your home, with the supports you choose

### **Possible risks of Medication Abortion**

- 2-10% chance the abortion will not be successful, and a surgery will be required
- Timing is less predictable than a surgical procedure; the abortion can take anywhere from 1-5 weeks to complete
- Vaginal bleeding is expected to be heavier than a normal period, with clots and sometimes tissue passed; rarely there is so much bleeding that an emergency surgical procedure (<1%) or blood transfusion (<1/1000) is required; in very rare cases a hysterectomy (removal of the uterus) may be required to control bleeding
- The medications may have side effects, as listed above
- Sensitivity or allergic reaction to the medications used
- Cramping may be severe and sometimes prolonged
- Rarely, people may develop an infection in their uterus or pelvis, requiring treatment with antibiotics; if left untreated, this can cause severe illness and difficulty becoming pregnant again
- The risk of death from an abortion (medical or surgical) is very small, approximately 12 times *lower* than the risk from a normal pregnancy and childbirth