



The American College of
Obstetricians and Gynecologists



FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS
FAQ168
PREGNANCY

Pregnancy Choices: Raising the Baby, Adoption, and Abortion

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What are my options if I find out that I am pregnant?

There are three options available to you if you discover you are pregnant: 1) you can give birth to the baby and raise the baby, 2) you can give birth to the baby and place the baby for adoption; 3) you can end the pregnancy by having an abortion.

Before I begin to make a decision about my pregnancy, is there anything I should do?

Before making any decisions, you need to be sure that you are pregnant. If you took a home pregnancy test and the results show you are pregnant, you should see a health care provider to confirm the result. The health care provider will find out how far along you are in your pregnancy.

What factors should I consider when making a decision about pregnancy?

Your age, values, beliefs, health, current situation, and future goals all play a role in your decision. How far along you are in your pregnancy may limit your options. If you choose to have an abortion, it should be done early in pregnancy when there are fewer risks. If you have a medical condition, pregnancy may pose risks to your health and increase the risk of complications for the baby.

Is there anything I need to do while I am making a decision about my pregnancy?

While you are deciding, start taking a multivitamin with 600 micrograms of folic acid. This helps to protect the baby from certain birth defects. Do not drink alcohol, smoke, or take drugs. Talk to your health care provider about any prescription drugs or over-the-counter medications you are taking to make sure they are safe for the baby. If you choose to raise the baby or give the baby up for adoption, it is best to begin **prenatal care** as soon as you can.

Why is prenatal care important?

Good prenatal care makes it more likely that you will have a healthy baby. Prenatal care also includes learning about labor and delivery and choosing a birth control method to use after the baby is born.

What should I think about if I am considering raising the baby?

You may want to think about the following:

- Who can help you with child care? Do you have a partner or family members who can help you?
- Where will you and the baby live? Will you have to change your living arrangements?
- If you have other children, how will raising this child affect them?

It costs money to raise a child. You will need to have a means of financial support. If you have a full-time job, you will need to arrange care for the child while you are working. If you do not have a job or your job does not pay enough, you may be able to get help from government agencies or private organizations.

How does adoption work?

Each state has its own laws about adoption. The general process is that shortly after the baby is born, the birth mother (the woman who gives birth to the baby) signs papers that end her rights to the child and give her consent for the adoption. If the birth father is known and he admits to being the father, he also signs consent forms.

Sometimes the baby leaves the hospital with the adoptive parents. Sometimes the baby is first placed in foster care. During this time, the adoptive parents file legal papers asking to adopt the baby. A judge approves the adoption after a waiting period (usually 1–6 months). At this time, the adoption is final.

What are the types of adoption that are available?

There are three types of adoptions: 1) open, 2) closed, and 3) semi-open. In open adoption, the birth mother and the adoptive parents may meet and share names and addresses. In a closed adoption, the birth mother and the adoptive parents do not meet or know each others' names. The adoptive parents only get information about the birth parents' medical information or family history—nothing that would identify them. In a semi-open adoption, the adoption agency will provide the birth mother with information about the baby from the adoptive parents and vice versa, but there is no direct contact between the birth mother and the baby. Identities usually are kept hidden.

How are adoptions arranged?

An adoption can be arranged by an agency or, in some states, independently. Most agencies choose the adoptive parents after carefully screening and studying people who apply to adopt a baby. Some agencies let birth mothers participate in this process. In independent adoptions, babies are placed in the adoptive parents' home without an agency. This may be done through lawyers, health care providers, counselors, or independent organizations. Before the adoption is final, the new parents and the home setting must be approved by the state agency that handles adoptions and by the court.

If I choose adoption, is financial help available?

If you arrange an adoption through an agency, ask the agency what kind of financial help—both medical and legal—is offered. If you cannot afford a private lawyer to help you with the adoption, you may be able to find legal aid. Most states allow the adopting parents to pay the birth mother's legal and medical fees. Some states allow other fees and expenses to be paid, such as counseling. However, it is not legal for anyone to make money from an adoption.

If I am considering abortion, what should I know about my state's laws?

State laws vary about access to abortion. Some states require that girls younger than 18 years notify their parents or guardian or get permission from a court of law to have an abortion. Some states require that a woman receive counseling before an abortion. Some states have waiting periods (usually 24 hours) between the time when a woman receives counseling about abortion and when the procedure is performed.

What happens during an abortion procedure?

In an abortion procedure, the **embryo** or **fetus** is removed from a woman's **uterus**. If you decide to have an abortion, it should be done as early as possible. After 12 weeks, an abortion requires more steps and takes longer to perform.

What are the different types of abortion procedures?

Some abortion procedures are done by surgery. Some are done with medication. The type of abortion you have depends on your choice, your health, and how long you have been pregnant. See the FAQ [Induced Abortion](#) for detailed information about each type of abortion procedure.

When can each type of abortion be performed?

The most common type of surgical abortion is called **vacuum aspiration**. It can be performed up to 14 weeks of pregnancy in a health care provider's office or clinic.

After 14 weeks of pregnancy, the abortion procedure is called a **dilation and evacuation (D&E)**. A D&E takes longer to perform than a vacuum aspiration and it may require more than one visit. This procedure can be done in a health care provider's office, clinic, or hospital. You usually can go home within a few hours after the procedure is completed.

In a medical abortion, certain drugs are taken to cause an abortion. For this option, a woman usually must be no more than 9 weeks pregnant.

What are the risks associated with abortion?

In general, abortion is a low-risk procedure. Risks and complications depend on how early the abortion is done and the method that is used. Fewer than 1 in 100 women have complications from an abortion performed before 14 weeks of pregnancy. For later abortions, up to 2 in 100 women have complications. In most cases, the risks from an abortion are less than the risks of giving birth to a baby. Most health care providers agree that having one abortion does not affect later pregnancies or a woman's future health. However, the longer a woman waits to have an abortion, the more risk it carries for her.

What should I expect after having an abortion?

You usually will have a follow-up visit with your health care provider after the abortion. Be aware that you can get pregnant soon after having an abortion. You should use a birth control method to prevent pregnancy right away.

Glossary

Dilation and Evacuation (D&E): A procedure in which the cervix is opened and the contents of the uterus are removed with suction or other surgical instruments.

Embryo: The developing organism from the time it implants in the uterus up to 8 completed weeks of pregnancy.

Fetus: The developing organism in the uterus from the ninth week of pregnancy until the end of pregnancy.

Prenatal Care: A program of care for a pregnant woman before the birth of her baby.

Uterus: A muscular organ located in the female pelvis that contains and nourishes the developing fetus during pregnancy.

Vacuum Aspiration: A procedure in which part of the uterine lining or the entire contents of the uterus is removed with suction through a tube inserted into the uterus.

If you have further questions, contact your obstetrician–gynecologist.

FAQ168: Designed as an aid to patients, this document sets forth current information and opinions related to women's health. The information does not dictate an exclusive course of treatment or procedure to be followed and should not be construed as excluding other acceptable methods of practice. Variations, taking into account the needs of the individual patient, resources, and limitations unique to the institution or type of practice, may be appropriate.

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