



the abortion pill

by David Hager, M.D.



A positive pregnancy test is one of the most life-changing moments for a woman.

Never is it more important to base your decisions on accurate information.

Try to think beyond the pressures you face right now, and consider the long-term impact of your choices. Don't let *anyone* rush you into a medical decision before you understand the risks and consider all options.

One of your options is to take the “abortion pill” to cause what is called a medical abortion. But first, there are some things you should know.

Here is what happens during a medical abortion:¹

- 1. At the first doctor visit:** you will take three mifepristone pills, also known by the brand name Mifeprex[®]. You may also hear it referred to as RU-486. These pills contain a drug that cuts off the supply of blood and nutrients to the developing embryo.
- 2. Two days later:** you will return to the doctor to take another drug, misoprostol, also called Cytotec[®]. This causes your uterus to contract and expel the embryo. Though the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) recommends that you take two tablets by mouth, many abortion providers insert it in your vagina. You may also be given some antibiotics.²
- 3. Two weeks later:** a third visit to the doctor should confirm that the abortion is complete. However, 1 to 4 percent of women will still need a surgical abortion to terminate the pregnancy. This could mean a fourth and maybe fifth visit.

You should expect to have vaginal bleeding or spotting for an average of 9 to 16 days. Up to 8 percent of all women may experience some bleeding for 30 days or more.³

You should know . . .

*The abortion pill is **not** the same thing as the “morning-after pill,” which is also called emergency contraception or “E.C.”*

You should not get a medical abortion if you have:⁴

- high blood pressure
- heart disease
- bleeding problem
- anemia
- uncontrolled diabetes
- pregnancy outside the uterus, known as an ectopic pregnancy—usually in the fallopian tube
- an IUD in place

Side effects

The FDA says that the abortion pill can have serious side effects and complications, such as:⁵

- hemorrhage (heavy bleeding)
- serious infections

You should know . . .

Consider what the FDA says about possible side effects and complications.

Since September 2000, the FDA has tracked complications in the United States following



medical abortions. An article⁶ in the *New England Journal of Medicine* citing those FDA reports states that . . .

- At least five women have died from a severe infection in their bloodstream after taking the abortion pill and having misoprostol inserted in their vagina.
- These infections were caused by *Clostridium sordellii*, a bacterium that rarely causes genital infections in women. Each of these women became ill very quickly and died from a fast-growing infection.

Important: Within the first 24 hours after taking mifepristone and misoprostol, contact your health-care professional right away if you experience:⁷

- heavy bleeding that soaks through two thick, full-size sanitary pads per hour for two hours
- persistent stomach pain or discomfort
- weakness
- nausea
- vomiting
- diarrhea, with or without fever
- fever of 100.4° or higher for more than 4 hours

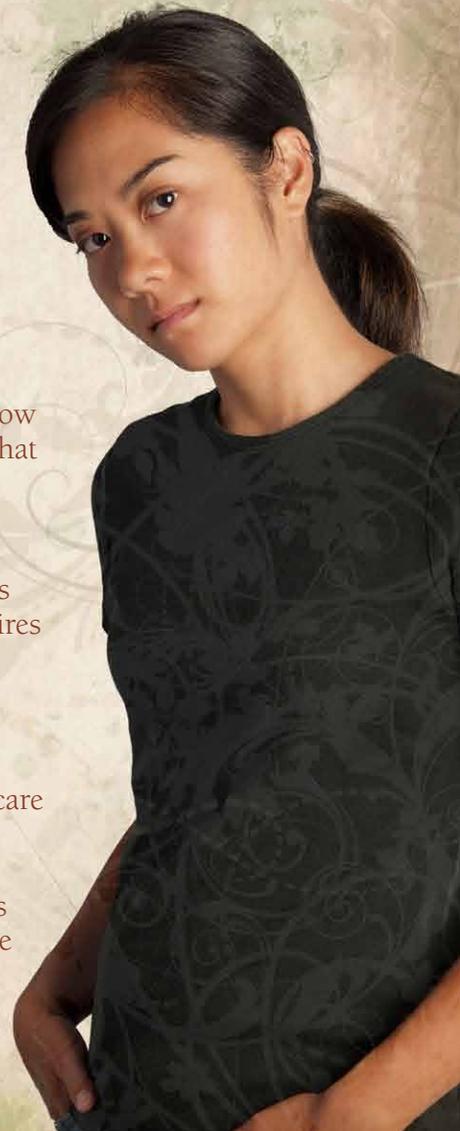
These symptoms, even without a fever, may indicate a serious and possibly fatal blood infection called sepsis.

Ignoring the guidelines below makes a medical abortion even less safe.

You should know . . .

The FDA says you should not take mifepristone if it has been more than 49 days since your last menstrual period began.⁸

- Take misoprostol only at the health-care professional's office, per the FDA.⁹
- Do not order the abortion pill online, because:
 - It's not legal to sell it online.¹⁰
 - The quality of the medication is not reliable.¹¹
 - If dangerous side effects occur, you will need a health-care professional to take care of you.
- Get an ultrasound to help determine if the pregnancy is in your uterus.¹²
 - The abortion pill doesn't work if the pregnancy is ectopic (outside your uterus).
 - If the pregnancy is in your fallopian tube, the embryo will continue to grow and could cause the tube to burst. That can be fatal.
 - The cramping and abdominal pain that may result from the use of the abortion pill can mask the symptoms of an ectopic pregnancy, which requires emergency care.
 - If you have little or no bleeding after taking misoprostol, it could be a warning sign for ectopic pregnancy. Check with your health-care professional.¹³
- Do not go to an abortion provider who lacks immediate access to a surgical facility in case you need an emergency surgical abortion.¹⁴



Think about the life within you before you take the abortion pill

Despite its known risks, the abortion pill has been called a major medical breakthrough. In fact, some groups go so far as to say that it's a real step forward for the health of women, even that it "saves lives."

This is just not true. As an obstetrician, I can tell you that an incredibly special and completely unique person is growing inside of every pregnant woman.

You can see for yourself, at the Mayo Clinic's Web site on prenatal development, that just six weeks after your last period, your baby's heart has already begun beating, and he or she has the beginning of arms, legs, eyes, mouth and eyes. Go to mayoclinic.com/health/prenatal-care/PR00112

Even if you yourself have no major complications after taking the abortion pill, this method always leads to the death of a baby.

Take time to consider all your options and get counseling from someone who does not have a financial or personal stake in your decision. Then choose well.

Dr. David Hager is a board-certified obstetrician/gynecologist currently practicing gynecology at Women's Care Center in Lexington, Ky.

Things I want to ask my doctor . . .

Do you know the difference?

Sometimes these pills get confused.

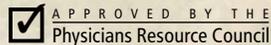
The Abortion Pill:	The Morning-After Pill:
An abortion method used to terminate an early pregnancy	A method used to prevent pregnancy. It may cause a very early abortion if fertilization has already occurred.
Medications are Mifeprex® (mifepristone) and Cytotec® (misoprostol)	Medication is Plan B® One-Step (levonorgestrel)
Must be taken within 49 days of when your last menstrual period began	Must be taken within 72 hours after unprotected sex
Pills must be prescribed by a health-care professional. At least three visits to your provider are needed, possibly more	Depending on one's age, the pill may be purchased without a prescription.
Will not prevent sexually transmitted infections or diseases	Will not prevent sexually transmitted infections or diseases



Sources:

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