

Risks & complications of surgical abortion

The Fertility Control Clinic has been providing surgical abortion services since 1972. It is Australia's first private facility established to provide women access to safe and confidential termination of pregnancy and contraception. The Fertility Control Clinic is a registered health care facility and accredited against ISO 9001 and the National Safety and Quality Health Service Standards.

The risk of complications from a surgical abortion is small – in fact it is safer than having one's tonsils or appendix removed.

Although serious complications in an abortion are uncommon, all medical and surgical procedures have risks and the following are possible risks.

Excessive Bleeding

Occasionally very heavy bleeding can occur at the time of the procedure but rarely does the bleeding require the patient to be transferred to another hospital. Troublesome or prolonged bleeding after an abortion may occur and this usually requires no specific treatment.

Retained Products of Conception

Retained products of conception means some pregnancy tissue has remained in the uterus after the procedure. It occurs in less than 1% of abortions and causes very heavy bleeding and abdominal cramps. Repeat curettage of the uterus is usually necessary.

Infection

Post abortion infection occurs in up to 10% of women, but is usually not serious. The symptoms of infection are abdominal pain, fever and an unpleasant smelling discharge with or without bleeding. Infection may be related to unrecognised chlamydial infection (STI). Risks of infection are reduced by routine screening for lower genital tract infection or by prophylactic antibiotics for advanced pregnancies.

Uterine Perforation

This is an extremely rare complication. One of the instruments used during the operation can perforate the wall of the uterus causing a small hole. Usually this is of no consequence and observation in hospital is all that is required. Rarely, an operation may be necessary to repair the uterine wall. Uterine perforation is minimised when the cervix is primed prior to the procedure with a prostaglandin such as misoprostol.

Continuing Pregnancy

Very occasionally, particularly if the operation is done very early in the pregnancy, the pregnancy may not be removed. If pregnancy symptoms persist for more than a week post operatively please contact the Fertility Control Clinic. You must return to the clinic if you do not get a period within 6 weeks.

Ectopic Pregnancy

An ectopic pregnancy occurs when a fertilised egg does not implant and grow in the uterus as usual, but instead implants and begins to grow elsewhere, usually in the fallopian tube. An abortion will not remove the ectopic pregnancy and admission to a hospital will be necessary to remove the pregnancy.

Anaesthetic Complications

This can include allergic reactions to anaesthetic agents both local and general. This can happen in any kind of operation, so it is important for you to provide full and accurate information about your medical history. You must also not have had anything to eat or drink, not even water, after midnight the night before your procedure to minimise nausea and vomiting and serious lung complications.

Psychological consequences

A small minority of women can experience short term mild depression to longer term more severe depression following an abortion. Usually there are clear indications of this risk prior to the procedure, but prediction of the future emotional wellbeing is not an exact science. Our team of counsellors and clinical psychologist can assist you, but the ultimate decision to terminate the pregnancy is yours.

Please remember, the Fertility Control Clinic has been providing surgical abortion services since 1972 and is a leader in women's reproductive health.

Alternatives to abortion

The alternatives to abortion are continuing the pregnancy with a view to parenting or adoption. Appropriate referrals are made on request and as required, please ask your counsellor.

The Fertility Control Clinic recognises a woman's right to unbiased, respectful and high quality support and health services.