

Medication termination in Tasmania

Can I have a phone interpreter when I see the doctor?

Yes, it is important for you and your doctor to have a phone interpreter. When you call to make the appointment, tell the doctor that you need a phone interpreter. The doctor can organise a phone interpreter by calling the Translating and Interpreter Service on 131 450.

What is a medication termination?

The English words for termination are termination or abortion. A termination is a medical procedure to intentionally end a pregnancy. Terminations are legally available in Tasmania.

A medication termination is where a doctor gives you tablets that end the pregnancy.

For this kind of termination, you do not need to have an operation. You take the tablets at home or somewhere else that is safe. The tablets cause a miscarriage and this ends the pregnancy.

Can I have a medication termination?

You can have a medication termination if:

- You are less than 9 weeks pregnant. The doctor will ask you when your last period was. You will also have an ultrasound and blood tests to confirm how many weeks pregnant you are.
- You are in good health. Please tell your doctor if you have any health issues or are on other medications.

A medication termination can last 3-4 days. While the termination is happening, you must:

- Stay within one hours drive of a hospital.
- Stay somewhere with access to a toilet, that has privacy.
- Have someone you trust stay with you.
- Have access to a phone so that you can call if you need help.

You also need to have an appointment with the doctor 14 -21 days after the termination to make sure the termination was complete.

Where can I get a medication termination?

Some GPs can provide a medication termination. If your GP does not offer medication terminations, they can organise for you to have an ultrasound and blood tests done, and refer you to another GP or Family Planning Tasmania.

These services can also help you to find a doctor who can prescribe the medication for you:

- Women's Health Tasmania - 1800 675 028
- The Link Youth Health Service – 6231 2927
- Pulse Youth Health South – 6166 1421
- Family Planning Tasmania – 6273 9117 (South), 6343 4566 (North), 6431 7692 (North West)

How much does it cost to have a medication termination?

The cost of a medication termination varies depending on whether you go to a private GP, a service such as Family Planning Tasmania and whether you have private health insurance cover for this procedure. Usually the cost is around \$300. Check with your private health insurance if they will cover the medication termination.

Can I get any help with the cost?

The Women's Health Fund and Youth Health Fund are schemes that can cover the costs of a termination and long acting contraceptives.

The Women's Health Fund is for women aged 25 years or older. The Youth Health Fund is for women aged under 25 years.

Both of these schemes can cover the cost of a medication termination for women who:

- have a Commonwealth Concession Card; OR
- are in financial hardship (including women who are not Australian citizens and don't have access to Medicare but who are in financial hardship)

Talk to the doctor about this or call Women's Health Tasmania on 1800 675 028 or The Link Youth Health Service on 6231 2927.

What happens before the medication termination?

If you decide to have a medication termination, you will meet with the doctor for a medical consultation. A nurse may also be involved. They will:

- Confirm if this procedure is suitable for you
- Explain the process of having a medication termination
- Discuss the arrangements you have at home to support you
- Make the arrangements for the termination if you decide to go ahead, including prescribing the medications you need
- Organise for you to have an ultrasound, blood tests and swabs of your vagina (if required)
- Complete a consent form.

What happens during the medication termination?

For a medication termination there are two tablets that you must take.

The first medication is called mifepristone. These tablets will stop the pregnancy from continuing. Once you have taken this tablet you cannot stop the termination. You must take the second tablet.

The second medication is called misoprostol. This is usually taken 36 hours later. These tablets cause the uterus to contract and expel the pregnancy. This results in pain and bleeding from your vagina. The pain is usually much stronger than period pain and the bleeding is usually heavier than a period. The bleeding usually starts one to four hours after taking the medication but the timing can be unpredictable. It is important that you are at home or somewhere private and safe during this time. After taking this tablet you might also experience nausea, vomiting, diarrhoea, dizziness, headaches and fever (this varies between women). Your doctor may prescribe medication to help you manage nausea and pain.

Your doctor will also talk to you about what to do if you have concerns.

What happens after the medication termination?

You must have a follow up blood test around 10 days after you take the medication. A blood test is the only way to know that the medication termination has ended the pregnancy.

To reduce the risk of infection during the week after the abortion it is recommended that you:

- Shower instead of taking a bath
- Use pads instead of tampons
- Do not have sexual intercourse
- Do not go swimming
- Avoid any strenuous activity, including sport or heavy physical work until the bleeding stops

What are the possible complications?

Serious complications of medical termination are uncommon but can include haemorrhage, infection, retained products of conception or that the procedure does not end the pregnancy.

When should I seek medical advice after a surgical termination?

See a doctor or go to the hospital emergency department if you:

- Have continued heavy bleeding
- Are not bleeding at all 24 hours after taking the misoprostol
- Have signs you are still pregnant after a week

Counselling and support

Free, confidential counselling through an interpreter is available to you at Women's Health Tasmania – call 1800 675 028.

Acknowledgements

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