

Information to patients – abortion with medication

You are taking two drugs: mifepristone and misoprostol

The “abortion pill” is not one pill, but consists of two types of medicine. The first medicine is mifepristone. This makes the hormone progesterone work less. Progesterone is needed for a pregnancy to exist. The second medicine is misoprostol. This causes the uterus to contract, allowing the pregnancy to come out via the vagina. This often comes with blood loss and cramps.

The two drugs together stop pregnancy in 99%. The drugs can be prescribed up to 63 days after the last menstrual period (9 weeks of pregnancy).

An ultrasound is usually not necessary to know how long you are pregnant

When you or the doctor are in doubt about the duration of pregnancy an ultrasound is recommended. This ensures that you do not take these medicines after 9 weeks of pregnancy. This is because a different treatment is needed then.

An ultrasound is also recommended if you are more likely to have an ectopic pregnancy. This could be the case if you previously had an ectopic pregnancy or an inflammation of the ovaries. Also when you have reduced fertility or had a sterilization and when you are pregnant with an IUD.

Do you have a risk of a venereal disease (STD)?

If you think you might have an STD, tell your GP. Then this can be examined.

You should not use mifepristone and misoprostol if you have:

- a diagnosed ectopic pregnancy
- severe asthma
- chronic adrenal insufficiency
- porphyria

How to take mifepristone and misoprostol?

You take the medicines on two different days:

Moment 1: On the first day, you take 1 tablet of mifepristone at home. You take the pill with half a glass of water. Usually, you won't notice anything after taking it, which is normal. Sometimes there is a little blood loss, that is normal too.

Moment 2: The second medicine, misoprostol, are 4 vaginal tablets. You insert vaginally all four of these directly one after the other. You insert these tablets at least 24 hours to a maximum of 72 hours after taking the mifepristone.

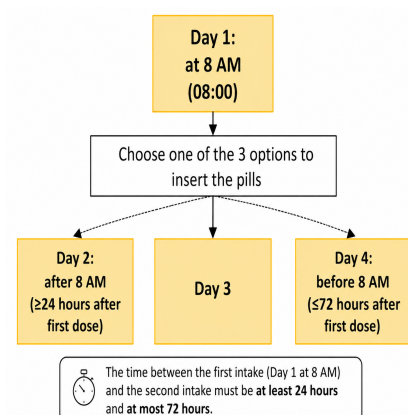
Example:

Moment 1: You take the mifepristone pill at 8AM (08:00 in the morning).

Moment 2: You insert the 4 vaginal pills at the earliest 8AM (8:00 in the morning).

Want to take them later? You can: up to 3 days later at the latest, after the time you took the tablet. So you have time to plan when you start bleeding.

In this example: you insert the 4 vaginal tablets on day 4 before 8AM (08:00 in the morning)



At home, you can insert the 4 tablets of misoprostol into your vagina as deep as possible with your fingers. Just as you would insert a tampon. Do not go to the toilet in the first half hour afterwards, as you may lose the tablets. Do you lose the tablets after this half hour? No problem, the important substances will be absorbed into your body by then.

In most women bleeding starts 4-6 hours after inserting misoprostol. Therefore, use this medicine preferably (early) in the morning so you can still consult your GP during the day or pick up extra medication from the pharmacy, when nothing has happened. Is there still no blood loss after 6 hours? Contact your doctor for further instructions on the next working day. The situation is not urgent. The advice depends on how many days pregnant you are. You may need to insert another 4 misoprostol tablets in your vagina and wait for the bleeding to start. If the pregnancy is at a very early stage, your doctor may advise you to wait one week. After that, you may need to take both medicines again, following the same schedule.

Do you find vaginal insertion of tablets unpleasant? Then you can also keep the 4 tablets in your cheek pouch or under your tongue for half an hour and then swallow them. Do not swallow them directly, as this may cause more stomach and intestinal discomfort.

Please note: the leaflet for misoprostol does not provide any information about use in case of an abortion. Therefore, use the medicine as described here.

What can you expect?

When using mifepristone and misoprostol, the embryo stops growing and comes out via the vagina. This comes with blood loss and (painful) cramps. Use painkillers such as ibuprofen for pain. Most women can cope well with the pain, but sometimes the pain is more severe. Also, most women find the amount of blood loss acceptable, but sometimes bleeding lasts longer than expected.

Side effects of the drugs include mild fever, chills, stomach and intestinal discomfort, such as cramps and nausea. These side effects occur mainly in the first few days.

What painkillers can you use?

It is best to take painkillers at the same time you take misoprostol. This will not affect the treatment or outcome. Take 1200 mg of ibuprofen at once the first time. After that, take 400 mg ibuprofen every 4 hours, with a maximum of 3 times a day. You may take the maximum dose of 2400 mg ibuprofen for 1-2 days. Paracetamol probably doesn't work as well. You can take paracetamol together with ibuprofen, for example 1000 mg 4 times a day.

The duration and amount of bleeding

Sometimes bleeding starts shortly after taking the first medicine, mifepristone. In that case, take the second medicine (misoprostol) anyway, 24-72 hours later, because bleeding after only mifepristone does not mean that the treatment was successful.

Usually, bleeding starts 4-6 hours after taking misoprostol. It is most severe on the first day and sometimes on the second day. After that, it slowly gets less. Sometimes the bleeding lasts only a few days, but usually it lasts about 2 weeks. In some cases, the bleeding also lasts longer, for example 3 to 4 weeks.

During bleeding, it is best not to swim, bathe, use tampons or have sex.

When do you go to the GP?

Serious side effects or complications after the abortion pill are rare. In case of abnormal symptoms or concerns, ask your GP your question. In the evening, night and weekends, call the out-of-hours service (*huisartsenpost*).

When to contact a GP:

- The main complication is an ongoing pregnancy. In about 1% of treatments, there is blood loss but the pregnancy is not (completely) gone. Therefore, always do a pregnancy test after 4 weeks. A test before 4 weeks that does not indicate pregnancy is reliable, but one that indicates pregnancy is not reliable. Only if a test after 4 weeks indicates pregnancy you should contact your GP.
- Another complication is too much blood loss. This could mean that the pregnancy is not leaving the uterus properly. Do you have more than 4 blood-soaked large pads per hour for more than 2-3 hours at a time? Then call the GP, including evenings, nights and weekends.
- Misoprostol can cause fever. This is a normal side effect. Do you have a temperature above 38 degrees for more than 4 hours after taking misoprostol? There may be an infection and you need to call your GP or the out-of-hours service (*huisartsenpost*) in the evening, night and weekend.
- Inflammations after the abortion pill almost never occurs. Do you have a fever for several days after treatment, possibly with smelly discharge and abdominal pain? There may be an infection. If so, contact your GP or out-of-hours service (*huisartsenpost*), including evenings, nights and weekends.
- Does the bleeding last for more than 3-4 weeks? Consult your GP on weekdays during office hours. Sometimes a second treatment with medication or curettage is necessary.

Why is follow-up very important?

About 1% of women do have blood loss, although the pregnancy has not gone away and even continues to grow. Check-up is therefore very important. Do a pregnancy test yourself after 4 weeks. This will almost always be negative. In case of a positive test, contact your GP on weekdays during office hours. You will then need an ultrasound to check whether there is an ongoing pregnancy.

Would you like to talk about how you experienced the abortion, or which contraception suits you best? Then you can make an appointment with your GP after 4 weeks.

What contraception can you use after the abortion pill?

The day after taking misoprostol, you can start taking contraception (the contraceptive pill, patch or ring). This is immediately safe. You can also have a hormone implant inserted on this day. This immediately protects against another pregnancy. You can have an IUD placed after 6 weeks if the pregnancy test is negative.

Why does the information in the package leaflet or on the internet sometimes differ from this leaflet?

1. Misoprostol is also a stomach protector. So the information in the misoprostol package leaflet does not apply to you. It says that you should not use misoprostol during pregnancy because it can cause miscarriage. In your situation this is intended as part of the treatment.
2. You may come across information about abortion with medication that can be confusing but does not apply to you. Correct information for you is:
 - An ultrasound prior to using the abortion pill is not always necessary.
 - You can take the medication at home and do not have to stay near home or a hospital for two weeks.
 - The abortion pill is as effective and safe as a curettage in the abortion clinic.
 - In the Netherlands, the Rhesus factor is checked only in abortion clinics and hospitals in pregnancies of 7 weeks or more. During an abortion with medication supervised by a GP, this test is not offered. The benefits of this test in very early pregnancy is not clear, and it makes the treatment more complicated.

This leaflet was created by GPs in consultation with gynecologists, abortionists and pharmacists.

Summary

Swallow 1 tablet of mifepristone at home

After 24-72 hours, insert 4 tablets of misoprostol into the vagina at home

Usually bleeding and cramps start after 4-6 hours

No blood loss after 6 hours? Contact GP for further instructions the next working day, this is not urgent.

Contact your GP directly, including in the evenings and weekends(huisartsenpost):

- when you have 4 full large pads per hour for 2-3 hours, or
- fever above 38 degrees Celsius for more than 4 hours, or
- increasing abdominal pain and smelly vaginal discharge

Do a pregnancy test after 4 weeks. See your own GP if:

the test is positive, or

there is still blood loss, or

you want to talk about contraception or the abortion