

Surgical Termination of Pregnancy

Surgical termination of pregnancy (STOP) refers to a surgical procedure that ends a pregnancy by removing the foetus and placenta from the uterus. STOP is offered up to 12 weeks of pregnancy at Albury Wodonga Health, Wodonga campus.

STOP is a safe procedure for which major complications and mortality are very rare.

General features of STOP

Most STOPS are performed using 'suction (vacuum) aspiration'. Your cervix opening is gradually widened with rods of increasing size and a slim tube is then inserted into your uterus. The pregnancy (the foetus and the placenta) is withdrawn with gentle suction. Another instrument called a curette is used to check the uterus is empty.

This procedure takes less than 15 minutes.

Possible complications

Complications occur in around 3% of STOPS and can include:

- Haemorrhage – Bleeding after an abortion should be similar to a menstrual period. If heavy bleeding occurs the abortion may not be complete. Sometimes, treatment for this is to do a suction curettage of the uterus. Blood transfusion is rarely required.
- Infection – A fever (high temperature) may indicate that you have an infection. This can be caused by an incomplete abortion or a sexually transmitted infection. Sometimes, women can develop a chronic infection called pelvic inflammatory disease (PID). Treatment for infection is with antibiotics.
- Injury to the uterus – The walls of your uterus are muscular but soft. Sometimes the surgical instruments used for an abortion can injure (or 'perforate') the uterus. In rare instances, this can cause an abdominal infection and severe blood loss. This complication is very rare and, if it occurs, will usually be recognised and treated straight away.

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The logo for Gateway Health features a stylized green circle above the text 'gateway health' in a lowercase, sans-serif font. The word 'gateway' is in a lighter green, and 'health' is in a darker green. The logo is positioned in the bottom right corner of the page, partially overlapping a decorative yellow and blue curved graphic.

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Possible complications (continued)

- Injury to the cervix – The cervix is stretched during an abortion. If you have multiple procedures the cervix can weaken – this is sometimes called an 'incompetent' cervix. An incompetent cervix can cause problems in later pregnancies because it is too weak to remain fully closed under the weight of a growing pregnancy.

The last two complications are rare because surgical abortions are undertaken by experienced surgeons.

After a STOP

Be guided by your doctor as to how to care for yourself and reduce your risk of infection.

The following suggestions generally apply for 2 weeks after your procedure or a few days after the bleeding has stopped:

- Shower instead of taking a bath
- Avoid sexual intercourse
- Use sanitary pads instead of tampons
- Avoid going swimming

For more information visit The Royal Women's Hospital or the Better Health Channel:

- thewomens.org.au/health-information/unplanned-pregnancy-information
- betterhealth.vic.gov.au/health/healthyliving/abortion-procedures-surgical

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