

Pregnant and don't know what to do?

A guide to your options



A note on gender

This information is for anyone who may get pregnant including women, trans men and non-binary people.

Are you pregnant but not sure you want to be?

This booklet tells you about the options you have and where to go for help.

I think I'm pregnant

Am I definitely pregnant?

If you might be pregnant, you should take a pregnancy test.

You can do a pregnancy test from the first day of a missed period. If you take a test before this time, the level of pregnancy hormone, human chorionic

gonadotrophin (hCG), may be too low to show up on the test and you may get a negative result even if you're pregnant.

If you don't know when your period is due, the earliest time to take a test is three weeks after your last unprotected sex.

You can buy a pregnancy test from a pharmacy, or you can ask for a test to be done at:

- your general practice
- a contraception clinic
- a young people's service (there will be an upper age limit)
- a pharmacy (there may be a charge)
- most NHS walk-in centres (England only)
- a sexual health or genitourinary medicine (GUM) clinic.

For details on how to find one of these services see page 15.

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The test is positive – what do I do now?

If the pregnancy test is positive, this means you're pregnant. All tests are very reliable.

It's normal to feel a range of different emotions. You may feel some, all, or none of the following:

- happiness that you're able to get pregnant
- shock that you're actually pregnant
- worry that you aren't ready
- worry that you can't afford to have a baby
- anger that you're pregnant when you didn't choose to be
- anxiety about what other people will think
- excitement about such a big change in your life
- concern that you might make the wrong decision
- fear about the process of pregnancy and giving birth.

When do I have to make a decision about what to do?

Although you might feel under pressure to make a decision, it's important to take some time to consider your options and feel sure you're making the right decision for you.

It's important that you receive support when you need it and don't feel pressured by anyone into making a decision you don't want. The decision is yours. It can be very difficult to know what to do, but support is available to help you decide.

You can choose to:

- continue with the pregnancy and become a parent
- end the pregnancy by having an abortion
- continue with the pregnancy and choose adoption.

How can I make up my mind?

Talking to people you trust, and getting information about your options, can help you decide.

You may want to talk to a partner, family or friends, or you may prefer to speak to someone less close to you. The following services can talk confidentially with you, free of charge, about how you feel about the pregnancy and what options you have:

- your general practice (talk to your doctor or nurse)
- a contraception or sexual health clinic, including a young person's service.

For a fee, you can discuss your options with organisations such as bpas (helpline: 03457 30 40 30, www.bpas.org), Marie Stopes (helpline: 0345 300 8090, www.mariestopes.org.uk), and NUPAS (helpline: 0333 004 6666, www.nupas.co.uk).

There's useful information on their websites which can help you explore your feelings, including how you feel about becoming a parent, having an abortion, or choosing adoption.

If you're under 25, you'll find information and advice about all options, including abortion, from the Brook website at www.brook.org.uk

It's essential to get information and take time to explore how you feel so that you can make the decision that's right for you. Be aware that some organisations may not offer unbiased pregnancy counselling or advice and may lead you into making the wrong choice for you.

Northern Ireland

If you're faced with an unplanned pregnancy and you live in Northern Ireland, FPA in Northern Ireland can offer:

- non-directive counselling – this means that you'll be listened to, valued and understood and that the counsellor won't offer advice or try to direct you in any way
- information on all your options.

Call FPA in Northern Ireland on 0345 122 8687 to find out more.

Some things to think about

When you're making your decision, it may be helpful to consider the following things.

- **Your life now.** What's most important to you in your life at the moment? This might involve many things, such as family, friends, work and education.
- **Your future.** What are your hopes and aims for the future? Think about all aspects of your life.

How would these things be affected if you:

- continue with the pregnancy and become a parent
- end the pregnancy by having an abortion
- continue with the pregnancy and choose adoption.

Another way of thinking about your situation is to consider how the statements below make you feel.

- I feel ready to be a parent and bring up a child.
- I don't want to be pregnant.
- Having a baby will stop me doing the things in my life that are most important to me.
- I want to have a baby one day but I'd rather wait.
- I am willing to give up other things in my life in order to bring up a child.
- My family would help me if I have a baby.
- My family wouldn't approve if I have a baby.
- My partner wants to have a baby with me.
- My partner doesn't want to be a parent.
- I couldn't go through with an abortion.
- I agree with abortion.
- I'm worried this might be my only chance to have a baby.
- I wouldn't be able to go through with adoption.

Whatever you decide, it needs to be right for you. This booklet gives you information about continuing with the pregnancy, abortion and adoption. This may help you make a decision.

Continuing with the pregnancy

This section tells you about where to go for help and advice if you decide to continue with the pregnancy.

What should I do now?

If you decide to continue with the pregnancy, you'll be able to get antenatal care (care during pregnancy), whether you're planning to be a parent or choose adoption. To start your antenatal care, you can visit your general practice (GP), or register with one. Or you may be able to go directly to a midwife at your nearest maternity unit.

To find your nearest maternity unit see <https://www.which.co.uk/birth-choice>

As part of your antenatal care, the doctor or midwife can talk to you about:

- healthy eating and exercise
- taking folic acid and vitamin D
- stopping smoking
- cutting out, or down on, alcohol
- stopping recreational drug use
- whether any medicines you're taking are unsafe during pregnancy
- getting advice and tests for sexually transmitted infections.

If you have a medical condition, such as epilepsy or diabetes, talk to your doctor or midwife as soon as possible because you may need special care.

If you're taking medication, it's important that you continue to take this and seek advice from a doctor or nurse as soon as possible.

Further information and advice

Other organisations that can offer help and information during and after your pregnancy include:

- **Tommy's**
(Pregnancy line: 0800 0147 800, www.tommys.org). Information on pre-pregnancy care and keeping healthy during pregnancy.
- **Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists**
(www.rcog.org.uk). Information about pregnancy, including alcohol, exercise, antenatal appointments, and links to other useful sites.
- **Working Families**
(Helpline: 0300 012 0312, www.workingfamilies.org.uk). Information and advice on all aspects of working and family life.
- **National Childbirth Trust (NCT)**
(Helpline: 0300 330 0770, www.nct.org.uk). Advice and support during pregnancy and after the birth.
- **NHS Smokefree**
(www.nhs.uk/smokefree). Advice and support on stopping smoking.
- **Frank**
(Helpline: 0300 123 6600, www.talktofrank.com). Information and help for drug and alcohol users.
- **Family Support NI**
(www.familysupportni.gov.uk/). Information for families and young people in Northern Ireland.

You can find details of GPs and pharmacies from NHS Choices in England, NHS Direct in Wales, NHS 24 in Scotland and your local health and social care trust in Northern Ireland (see page 15).

Extra help after the birth

You may worry that you won't be able to look after a baby. Knowing what help might be available may help you make a decision about your pregnancy. Here are some of the ways you may be able to get help.

- **Your partner, family and friends.** Think about who might be able to help you once the baby is born. If people you trust can help with things such as doing the shopping or looking after the baby, it can be a great support, and enable you to have some time to yourself.
- **Your midwife or health visitor** can offer advice and support, and put you in touch with local groups where you can meet other parents or get the support you need.
- **Social services** at your local authority can assess whether you might need extra support. They may be able to provide services such as nursery or day care, or a support worker who can come to your home.
- **Home-Start** (www.home-start.org.uk). A volunteer may be able to visit you at home to give free practical and emotional support. You can go directly to your local Home-Start or you can be referred by your doctor, practice nurse, midwife, health visitor or social services.

Abortion

Legal abortion is a safe way of ending a pregnancy. This is a decision you may make because you don't want to be pregnant.

Who can have an abortion?

Abortion is legal in most parts of the UK, regardless of your age. However abortion is only legal in Northern Ireland if there's a real and serious risk to your mental or physical health and the risk is permanent or long-term.

If you live in Northern Ireland, you can travel to England for an abortion where you can get free care. If you're on a low income, or receive certain benefits, you'll be supported with travel and accommodation costs. You can call 0333 234 2184 to book an appointment with an abortion care

provider in England and get information about travel and accommodation funding. You can contact FPA in Northern Ireland (0345 122 8687) for confidential counselling, information and support.

When do I need to make my decision?

It's important not to delay making your decision. Legal abortion is safer and easier the earlier it's done in pregnancy. The majority of abortions are carried out before 13 weeks of pregnancy, and almost all of the rest are carried out before 20 weeks. Abortion after 24 weeks of pregnancy isn't common, but is legal in certain circumstances (for example, if it's less likely to cause harm to your physical or mental health than continuing with the pregnancy or there's a substantial risk of physical or mental disability if the baby was born).

You shouldn't have to wait more than two weeks from your first contact with your GP or clinic to the time of your abortion. There's no difference in the quality of care you should receive if you choose to pay for an abortion privately or go through the NHS.

Will anyone else be told about my abortion?

If you have an abortion, no matter what age you are, you have a right for that information to remain confidential. This means that information can't be shared with anyone else without your agreement. If you've any worries about confidentiality discuss this with the doctor or nurse you speak to about your abortion.

- Your GP doesn't need to know, although many abortion services like to send a letter to your GP. This should only be done with your permission.
- Your partner, or the person you got pregnant with, doesn't have to know about the abortion, and has no legal rights to make a decision about whether or not you continue with the pregnancy. You can go ahead with an abortion without a partner's knowledge or agreement.

- If you're under 16, you can have an abortion without telling your parents or carers. The doctors will encourage you to tell your parents or another supportive adult, but if you choose not to, you can still have an abortion if the doctors believe that you fully understand what's involved and it's in your best interests.
- If you have a learning disability you can have an abortion without telling your carers. However, this is a complex issue and may sometimes require legal advice. If social services are already involved, they'll act in your best interests, which may involve telling parents or carers, with your agreement.

Confidentiality

All information, advice and services are confidential, but healthcare professionals are obliged, with your knowledge, to involve social services if they suspect you, or another person, to be at significant risk of harm (for example, sexual, emotional or physical abuse).

What's involved in an abortion?

For some people, deciding whether or not to have an abortion is easier if you know how an abortion is carried out. There are different abortion procedures, and the method used depends on how long you've been pregnant, your medical suitability and your preferences. You can find out more about abortion procedures from:

- **FPA's information Abortion: Your questions answered at www.sexwise.org.uk**
- **The Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists (www.rcog.org.uk).**

Where can I go if I want an abortion?

Abortion care is free through the NHS. It's also available through private clinics and hospitals for a fee (the cost will vary).

- You can go to your GP, local contraception or sexual health clinic or young people's service. They can refer you for an abortion through the NHS (to find your nearest service see Where can I get more information and advice? on page 15).
- As the law in Northern Ireland is different from the rest of the UK, you can only have an abortion if there's a real and serious risk to your mental or physical health and the risk is permanent or long-term. You can contact your GP to be referred to your local hospital if you feel your circumstances fit this description. Most women from Northern Ireland travel to England for an abortion where you can get free care. You can contact FPA in Northern Ireland (0345 122 8687) for confidential counselling, information and support.
- You can contact fee paying abortion providers directly. You don't have to be referred by a doctor.

Some things you might want to know about abortion

- Legal abortion is a safe procedure in the UK.
- Abortion is free if you're referred through the NHS.
- You may experience many different feelings after an abortion. You may feel sad and upset immediately after an abortion but the vast majority of people don't experience long-term psychological problems.
- Having an abortion won't affect your chances of having a baby in the future if there are no problems with the abortion, such as injury to the uterus (womb) or cervix, or serious infection. These problems aren't common. There's some evidence that if you've had an abortion there may be a small increased risk of premature (early) birth if you get pregnant again.
- Having an abortion doesn't increase your risk of developing breast cancer.

For more information on abortion read FPA's information Abortion: your questions answered or visit www.sexwise.org.uk

Adoption

Adoption could be a choice for you if you don't want to become a parent but you don't want an abortion.

What's adoption?

Adoption is a way of giving a child new parents. You'll continue with the pregnancy and give birth, but you won't look after the baby, and you won't have legal rights or responsibilities regarding the child once the adoption is complete.

Adoption is a formal process organised by adoption agencies and local authorities, and made legal by the courts. Once an adoption is made legal the decision is final and can't be changed.

How does adoption take place?

Although you can start preparing for adoption at any time during your pregnancy, the adoption won't be completed until after the baby is born. You'll be asked to sign a formal document agreeing to the adoption, but you can't be asked to do this until the baby is six weeks old. This agreement doesn't make the adoption final.

Usually the baby will go to foster carers for a short time while arrangements are made for the baby to move to the adoptive parents. The adoptive parents will then look after the baby, and apply to the court for an adoption order. Once the order is granted, the adoption is final and you'll no longer be the baby's legal parent.

Can I change my mind?

You can change your mind at any stage before the adoption has been made legal but it may not be easy, or even possible, to get the baby back, depending on how far the adoption has progressed. The court will make a decision based on what's best for the baby. Once the adoption has been made legal, the baby will stay with the adoptive parents even if you change your mind.

What do I do if I think I want to choose adoption?

If you think you might want to continue with the pregnancy and have the baby adopted, you may find it helpful to talk with someone who can tell you more about adoption, including:

- a doctor or nurse at your general practice (GP)
- a social worker at your hospital (contact your local hospital to find out whether there's a social worker attached to the maternity unit)
- an adoption social worker at your local authority's social services department or at a local voluntary adoption agency. See *Where can I get more information and advice?* on page 15 or contact the fostering and adoption organisation CoramBAAF (tel: 020 7520 0300, www.corambaaf.org.uk). If you live in Northern Ireland, you can contact Adopt NI (tel: 028 90454222, www.adoptni.com).

If you're considering adoption, the social worker or adoption agency that's supporting you will arrange special adoption counselling. This is to make sure that you know exactly what the adoption involves, and to help you make the right decision for you.

Some things to think about

If you're thinking about choosing adoption, finding out more about the adoption process may help you to work out if it's a good decision for you.

You may want to know answers to these questions.

- Do I have to tell anyone about the adoption, such as the person I got pregnant with or my parents?
- Does the person I got pregnant with have a say in the adoption?
- Will I be able to help choose the adoptive parents?
- Will I be able to have any contact with the child once they're adopted, or any say in the way they're brought up?
- Can an adoption be undone if I want the baby back later?

- Can I write a letter to the baby explaining why I chose to have them adopted?
- Will the baby be able to find me when they grow up?

To find out the answers to these and any other questions, you can ask an adoption social worker or contact CoramBAAF (see previous page for details).

Where can I get more information and advice?

The National Sexual Health Helpline provides confidential advice and information on all aspects of sexual health. The number is 0300 123 7123. It's open Monday to Friday from 9am-8pm.

For more information on sexual health visit www.fpa.org.uk or www.sexwise.org.uk

Information for young people can be found at www.brook.org.uk

Clinics

To find your closest clinic you can:

- use Find a Clinic at www.fpa.org.uk/clinics
- download FPA's Find a Clinic app for iPhone or Android.

Details of general practices and pharmacies in England are at www.nhs.uk and in Wales at www.nhsdirect.wales.nhs.uk. In Scotland details of general practices are at www.nhsinform.scot and in Northern Ireland at www.hscni.net

A final word

This booklet can only give you general information. The information is based on evidence-guided research from the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists (RCOG) and National Institute of Health and Care Excellence guidelines.

Contact your doctor, practice nurse or a sexual health clinic if you're worried or unsure about anything.



the sexual health charity



sexwise.org.uk

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If you'd like information on the evidence used to produce this booklet or would like to give feedback email feedback@fpa.org.uk

