

Pregnant and don't know what to do?

A guide to your options



Are you pregnant but not sure you want to have the baby?

Do you need more information about the options available to you?

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

I think I'm pregnant

Am I definitely pregnant?

If you think you could be pregnant you should do a pregnancy test as soon as possible. You can do a pregnancy test from the first day of a missed period.

If you do 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 though you are pregnant.

If you don't know when your next period is due, the earliest time to do a test is three weeks (21 days) after unprotected sex.

You can buy a pregnancy test from a pharmacy to do yourself, 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 are pregnant. All tests, including tests you do yourself, are very reliable.

It's normal to feel a range of different emotions when you find out you are pregnant. You may feel some, all or none of the following:

- happiness that you are able to get pregnant
- shock that you are actually pregnant
- worry that you aren't ready, or can't afford, to have a baby
- anger that you are 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 childbirth.

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

Whatever you feel, you now need to think about what to do. It is important to take time to make the decision that's right for you, but it's also important not to delay making your decision.

Don't let anyone else pressure you into doing something you don't want to do. The decision is yours. For some women it can be very difficult working out what to do, but there is support available to help you think through all your options.

You can choose to:

- continue with the pregnancy and keep the baby
- end the pregnancy by having an abortion
- continue with the pregnancy and have the baby adopted.

How can I make up my mind?

Talking to people you trust, and getting accurate information about all your options, can help you make up your mind.

You may want to talk to your partner, family or friends, or you may feel more comfortable speaking to someone who isn't so 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
- a young people's service (these will have an upper age limit)

Northern Ireland

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

- non-judgemental and non-directive counselling
- information on all your options to help you decide what to do.

Call FPA in Northern Ireland on 0845 122 8687 to find out more.

Wherever you live, for a fee, you can discuss your options with organisations such as Marie Stopes (helpline: 0845 300 8090, www.mariestopes.org.uk) and bpas (helpline: 08457 30 40 30, www.bpas.org).

There is useful information on their websites which can help you explore your feelings, including how you feel about having a baby or having an abortion.

Young people under 25 can get support, information and advice about all options, including abortion, from the Brook helpline on 0808 802 1234.

It is essential that you are given accurate information and time to explore how you feel so that you can make the decision that is right for you. Be aware that some organisations may not offer unbiased pregnancy counselling or advice and may lead women into making the wrong choice for them.

Some things to think about

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

- **Your life now.** What is 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 decide to:

- continue with the pregnancy and keep the baby
- end the pregnancy by having an abortion
- continue with the pregnancy and have the baby adopted.

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 do want to have a baby one day but I'd rather wait (because I feel I'm too young, or I'd like to be in a committed relationship).
- 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.
- 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 give my baby away.

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

Continuing with the pregnancy

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

What should I do now?

If you decide to continue with the pregnancy you need to start your antenatal care (care during pregnancy), whether you are planning to keep the baby or to have it adopted. To start your antenatal care you can visit your general practice, 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 www.birthchoiceuk.com

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

- healthy eating and exercise
- taking folic acid
- stopping smoking
- cutting out, or down on, alcohol
- stopping recreational drug use
- whether any medicines you are 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 are taking medication, it is 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 for women about pregnancy, including alcohol, exercise, antenatal appointments, and links to other useful sites.
- **Working Families**
(Helpline: 0300 012 0312, www.workingfamilies.org.uk). Offers 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.

You can find details of general practices and pharmacies from 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 be worried that you won't be able to cope with looking after a baby. Knowing what help might be available may help you make a decision about your pregnancy.

Below 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 new mums 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 help. 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 do not want to be pregnant and have a baby at this time.

Who can have an abortion?

Abortion is legal in the UK regardless of your age. How easy it is to arrange an abortion can vary throughout the UK, and it can be very difficult to obtain an abortion in Northern Ireland.

When do I need to make up my mind?

It is important not to delay making your decision. Legal abortion is safer and easier the earlier it is done in pregnancy. The majority of abortions are carried out before 13 weeks of pregnancy, and most of the rest are carried out before 20 weeks. Abortion after 24 weeks of pregnancy is not common, but is legal in certain circumstances (for example, if it is less likely to cause harm to a

woman's physical or mental health than continuing with the pregnancy or there is a substantial risk of physical or mental disability if the baby was born).

You should not have to wait more than two weeks from your first contact with your GP or clinic to the time of your abortion. There is 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?

Any woman who has an abortion, whatever age she is, has a right for that information to remain confidential. This means that information cannot be shared with anyone else without your agreement. If you have any worries about confidentiality discuss this with the doctor or nurse you speak to about your abortion.

- Your GP does not 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 father of the child, does not have to know about the abortion, and he 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 your partner's knowledge or agreement.
- If you are under 16 or have learning disabilities, you can have an abortion without telling your parents or carers. The doctors will encourage you to involve 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 is involved and it is in your best interests.

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 is involved in an abortion?

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

- **FPA's booklet *Abortion: Your questions answered* or www.fpa.org.uk**
- **The Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists** (www.rcog.org.uk) – the website has clear information about abortion.

Where can I go if I want an abortion?

Abortion care is available free through the NHS, or through other clinics and hospitals for a fee (the cost will vary).

- You can go to your general practice, 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).
- It can be very difficult to get referred for an abortion in Northern Ireland. Women in Northern Ireland can contact the FPA unplanned pregnancy service on 0845 122 8687. They will be able to advise you about getting a private abortion in England if that is what you decide to do.
- You can contact fee paying abortion providers directly. You do not 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 are referred through the NHS.
- A woman can experience many different feelings after an abortion. Some women feel sad and upset immediately after an abortion but the vast majority do not experience long-term psychological problems.
- Having an abortion will not 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 are not common. There is some evidence that if you have had an abortion there may be a small increased risk of premature birth if you get pregnant again.
- Research shows that having an abortion does not increase your risk of developing breast cancer.

For more information on abortion read the FPA booklet *Abortion: your questions answered* or visit www.fpa.org.uk

Adoption

Adoption could be a choice for you if you do not want to bring up the baby yourself but you do not want an abortion.

What is adoption?

Adoption is a way of giving the baby new parents who will bring him or her up as their own. You will 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 cannot 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 will be asked to sign a formal document agreeing to the adoption, but you cannot be asked to do this until the baby is six weeks old. This agreement does not make the adoption final.

Usually the baby will go to foster carers for a short time while arrangements are made for him or her 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 will 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 your baby back, depending on how far the adoption has progressed. The court will make a decision based on what is 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 have the baby adopted?

Making a decision to have a baby adopted can be very difficult. 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:

- the doctor or nurse at your general practice
- a social worker at your hospital (contact your local hospital to find out whether there is 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 British Association of Adoption and Fostering. Tel: 020 7421 2680, www.baaf.org.uk).

If you are considering adoption, the social worker or adoption agency that is supporting you will arrange special adoption counselling. This is to make sure that you know exactly what the adoption involves, and to explore all possible options with you to help you make the right decision for you.

Some things to think about

If you are thinking about having the baby adopted, finding out more about the adoption process may help you to work out whether it is 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 baby's father or my parents?
- Does the baby's father 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 he or she is adopted, or any say in the way he or she is brought up?
- Can an adoption be undone if I want my baby back later?
- Can I write a letter to the baby explaining why I chose to have him or her adopted?
- Will the baby be able to find me when he or she grows up?

To find out the answers to these and any other questions, you can ask an adoption social worker or contact the British Association of Adoption and Fostering (see above for details).

Where can I get more information and advice?

The Sexual Health Information Line provides confidential advice and information on all aspects of sexual health. The number is 0300 123 7123 and the service is available from Monday to Friday from 9am - 8pm and at weekends from 11am - 4pm.

For additional information on sexual health visit www.fpa.org.uk

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

Clinics

To locate 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.

You can find details of general practices and pharmacies in England at www.nhs.uk and in Wales at www.nhsdirect.wales.nhs.uk. In Scotland you can find details of general practices at www.nhs.24.com 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 Faculty of Sexual and Reproductive Healthcare of the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists and National Institute of Health and Care Excellence guidance.

Remember - contact your doctor, practice nurse or a sexual health clinic if you are worried or unsure about anything.



talking sense about sex



www.fpa.org.uk

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If you would like information on the evidence used to produce this booklet or would like to provide us with feedback about this booklet email feedback@fpa.org.uk

