

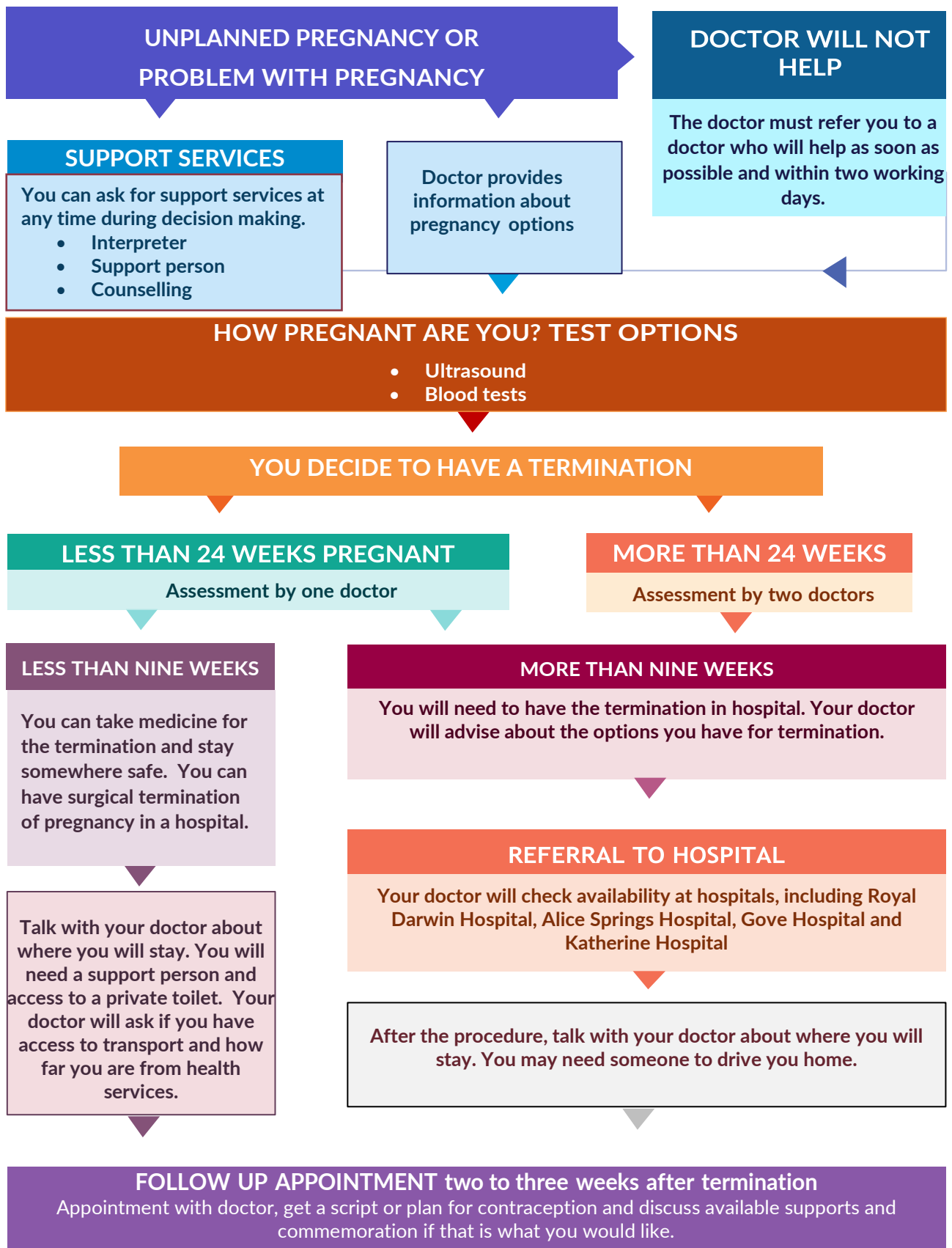
# Having a termination of pregnancy (abortion) in the Northern Territory

This booklet helps people in the Northern Territory to understand what to expect when having a termination of pregnancy (abortion).

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## The termination of pregnancy (abortion) pathway



## What is this booklet about?

If you are pregnant and want a termination of pregnancy (also known as an abortion), this booklet gives you some unbiased information about your possible options.

## I had unprotected sex – what do I do?

If you have been sexually assaulted, had unprotected sex or contraception has failed (for example a condom 'broke') and you don't want to get pregnant, you may be able to take the emergency contraceptive pill (which used to be known as the 'morning after pill').

Emergency contraceptive pills **MUST BE TAKEN WITHIN FIVE (5) days** after having unprotected sex. They work best when taken as soon as possible after having unprotected sex.

These pills are taken at a very early stage, before it would be possible to tell if a pregnancy would happen. They are to stop it from happening and are very different from the medicine needed once it has been confirmed you are pregnant.

Emergency contraceptive pills are available from most pharmacies after you talk with a pharmacist. You do not need a prescription. If you live in a remote community these pills are usually available from your local health care centre (clinic).

## What do I do if I find out I am pregnant?

Many women or people who can get pregnant (as many as one in three women) have an unplanned or unexpected pregnancy at some time in their life. If you think you are pregnant you need to confirm this with a pregnancy test.

## Options for a pregnancy test

Options for a pregnancy test include:

- using a home pregnancy test from a pharmacy or supermarket
- seeing your local doctor who can do a urine or blood test
- going to your local healthcare centre (clinic) if you live in a remote community
- visiting or making an appointment at Family Planning Welfare NT (in Darwin and Palmerston).

## The pregnancy is planned but there is a problem with the pregnancy and I don't know what to do

You may have a planned pregnancy but find out there is a problem with the pregnancy. This can be a very concerning and confusing time. You will need to get as much information as you can about the pregnancy from your doctor, other specialists and the results of various tests. You can then discuss all of your options with your family, friends, doctor or others, such as counsellors.

## Options for your pregnancy

**If you have an unplanned or unexpected problem with a pregnancy you have three options:**

- continuing with the pregnancy with a view to parenting the child
- continuing with the pregnancy and placing the child with an agency for adoption
- terminating the pregnancy (also called abortion)

Your doctor or health professional can discuss your options and give you a *Pregnancy Options in the Northern Territory* booklet.

## Where do I go to talk about a termination of pregnancy?

You can talk about termination of pregnancy with your doctor, healthcare centre midwife, nurse or Aboriginal Health Practitioner. If you live in Darwin or Palmerston you can also call Family Planning Welfare NT on 8948 0144 to make an appointment to talk about your options.

## What if my doctor or health practitioner won't talk to me about termination of pregnancy?

If you choose a termination and your doctor or health practitioner will not help you, they must refer you in no more than two working days to another doctor or health practitioner who can help you as soon as possible.

## Who can make the decision about my termination of pregnancy?

If you are aged 18 years and over and not under the care of an adult guardian because of a disability, then you are able to make the decision without anyone other than your medical team being involved.

If you are under 18 years of age the doctor will need to consider your maturity and ability to make important decisions. If you are considered to be mature enough and have the ability to make an important decision about medical treatment then you will be able to make the decision on your own.

If you are 14 years or under, when you go to the doctor it may be necessary to have a person with parental authority available to help you or to make that decision with you.

No matter your age, but especially if you are young, you might prefer to have someone accompany you for support and to help with decision making and consent.

If an adult is coming along with you, they need to show the doctor that they support your choices, will keep your information confidential, are taking on board your wishes, and if they are going to be providing consent, they must be someone who has parental authority for you.

An adult who does not have parental responsibility for you cannot give consent to medical treatment. If your doctor considers you can make decisions for yourself, a parent/guardian cannot force the doctor to give you medical treatment you do not want.

## Your confidential information

If you do not want any other person (other than the medical team) to know about your pregnancy or the termination of pregnancy, you should inform your doctor and other health practitioners assisting you.

You should feel free to tell the medical team whether they can inform anyone else about any part of your care including any other health practitioners. It is important for you to tell the medical team if you do not want your local doctor or clinic to know about your pregnancy or termination.

If you do not inform the doctor, then your medical notes may be entered on a system accessed at your local clinic, or a discharge summary or referral will be sent to your usual doctor outlining what treatment you have received and what needs to be followed up by that doctor.

If you do not want your local doctor or clinic involved you will need to have a follow-up appointment with the doctor who performed the termination.

## How many weeks pregnant am I?

Your pregnancy is calculated from the first day of your last normal menstrual period. Your pregnancy is then counted in weeks and days rather than months.

Your doctor or a nurse or health practitioner will help you work out how far along in the pregnancy you are. This will be done with an ultrasound scan.

## Pregnancy has three main parts

Each part is called a trimester:

- The first trimester is from the beginning to 12 weeks.
- The second trimester is from 13 weeks to 28 weeks.
- The third trimester is from 29 to 40 weeks.

## What options do I have for a termination of pregnancy in the Northern Territory?

Up until nine weeks (63 days) gestation you may be eligible for an early medication termination of pregnancy. After this time you will need to have a termination of pregnancy in a hospital. Your doctor will help you decide what type of termination is best for you.

## Early medical termination of pregnancy

### Is an early medical termination right for me?

You will need to be assessed by a doctor to see if this option is right for you. You must be no more than nine weeks (63 days) pregnant to have an early medical termination (outside a hospital). You will need an ultrasound to confirm this.

Your doctor will check your health, as some medical conditions make medical termination unsafe. You will need to tell your doctor if you have any health problems.

If you are healthy and the doctor considers it is suitable for you to have an early medical termination, your doctor will write a care plan for you explaining each step you need to follow.

### What are the medicines I take?

You will need to take two different medicines that come together in a pack called MS-2Step.

The doctor will write a prescription for the medicines then you will need to go to a qualified pharmacist to collect the medicines. The pharmacist will give you information about taking the medicines.

The first medicine is called Mifepristone, this is also known as RU-486. This medicine comes in a green box and contains one tablet.

The second medicine is called Misoprostol, this is the medicine in the purple box (four tablets). You take this 36-48 hours after the first tablet.

You can take the medicines at home (or at the clinic, with the doctor or other health professional). You need to talk to your doctor about where you will stay during the termination.

In some cases, the doctor can direct another health practitioner (for example another doctor, a nurse or a pharmacist) to help you take the drugs you need for this termination and to check on you during and after the process.

The termination may take three to four days to complete.

You will experience pain and bleeding usually heavier than a period. You will be given medication to help ease the pain.

### Things to consider when having an early medical termination

- Your doctor will talk with you about what you need during the termination and check you can get appropriate care in the unlikely event of a medical emergency.
- Your doctor will ask if you have:
  - a working phone and phone coverage
  - reliable transport and road access, including wet season access
  - safe accommodation, including privacy and a toilet and shower facility
  - a support person or people for the whole time of the termination.
- On rare occasions the process does not work fully and you may need extra medicine or a separate surgical termination.
- You will need a health check-up 14 to 21 days after the process to make sure the termination is complete and to discuss contraception options.

## Surgical termination of pregnancy

- Surgical termination of pregnancy is available in consultation with one doctor up to 24 weeks gestation. After 24 weeks gestation, at least two doctors need to be consulted about your termination of pregnancy.
- A surgical termination is an operation done in a hospital or day surgery. The process usually involves a suction curette (removal of tissue from the uterus) and in most cases is done under a general anaesthetic.
- You can usually leave hospital the same day after having a surgical termination but you will experience pain and bleeding so you will need a support person to bring you home from hospital.

Talk to your doctor who can give you more information about which type of termination might be right for you.

## Things to consider when having a surgical termination

- There is a low risk that the operation (a curette) will not remove all of the tissue forming part of the pregnancy. This can cause excessive bleeding and may mean that you need to have another operation.
- You can sometimes develop an infection that needs to be treated with antibiotics after surgical termination.
- There is a low risk that your cervix (opening of the uterus (womb)) or the uterus itself is damaged. This is rare and when it does happen, it mostly results in a small tear that heals itself.
- There is a low risk of excessive bleeding and in rare cases a blood transfusion may be needed.
- Any operation that needs to use an anaesthetic has risks. These are very low for healthy women and pregnant people. The doctor will explain the risks to you before the operation.

## Having a termination of pregnancy after 24 weeks

Termination of pregnancy is available if you are more than 24 weeks pregnant however after this time your doctor will have to talk with at least one other doctor (who has also examined you) about your request for a termination.

## Giving consent (agreeing) to a termination of pregnancy

Your doctor will ask questions to check you understand what a termination of pregnancy is, that you are making the right decision for you, and you have made the decision yourself.

## Will I be eligible for assistance from the Patient Assisted Travel Scheme (PATs) for termination of pregnancy services?

If you are eligible for an early medical termination and you do not have access to safe accommodation or appropriate access to medical support and emergency services, you and a support person may be eligible for assistance for travel and accommodation through PATs. You can talk about this with your doctor when you are discussing your options for a termination of pregnancy.

Help with travel and accommodation through PATs is also available for women and pregnant people having a surgical termination of pregnancy.



## What if I need an interpreter to access a termination of pregnancy?

If you need an interpreter for any language, your doctor or health practitioner can arrange an interpreter for you, either face to face or over the phone.

## How will I feel after a termination of pregnancy?

Most women and pregnant people who have made their own decision to terminate a pregnancy and have appropriate support, feel like they have made the right decision. Some women and pregnant people will have mixed emotions and may feel sadness and loss. Counselling can help you deal with your feelings. There are usually no lasting physical impacts.

## What about counselling?

You can ask for pregnancy options information before making a decision about termination of pregnancy (see the *Pregnancy Options in the Northern Territory* booklet for more information). You can also get supportive counselling during a termination. Counselling may be provided by a social worker or psychologist who specialises in this field. You may be able to speak with someone over the phone.

Counselling can continue if you need it following the termination of your pregnancy.

## Follow up doctor's visit after the termination of pregnancy

It is very important that you go back to the doctor who performed the termination or prescribed the medication between 14-21 days after the termination. The doctor will check the termination is complete and talk with you about the best type of contraception for you.

## Suggested contacts

It is best that you speak with your local doctor (who does not have an objection to termination of pregnancy) so they can give you the information you need to know for a termination of pregnancy.

Family Planning Welfare NT can also give information to women and pregnant people about termination of pregnancy, especially early medical termination of pregnancy.

### Children by Choice

This is a Queensland based woman-centred counselling, information and referral service which is pro-choice, non-directive and non-judgemental.

Visit their website for more information: <https://www.childrenbychoice.org.au/information-support/decision-making/>

### Family Planning Northern Territory

The Family Planning Welfare Association is located in Darwin and Palmerston Northern Territory and aims to promote sexual health and rights for everyone.

Visit their website for more information: <http://www.fpwnt.com.au/>.

### Shine South Australia

Shine South Australia is the Family Planning Association of South Australia.

Visit their website for more information: [www.shinesa.org.au/health-information/pregnancy/pregnancy-options/](http://www.shinesa.org.au/health-information/pregnancy/pregnancy-options/).

### Family Planning NSW

Yarning about pregnancy options is a booklet produced by Family Planning NSW for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, Aboriginal Health Workers, clinical, education and welfare professionals. The website has other booklets about sexual and reproductive health.

Visit their website: <https://www.fpnsw.org.au/health-information/aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander/yarning-about-resources>.

### Marie Stopes Australia

An organisation providing a range of reproductive health information and services including termination of pregnancy.

**Call: 1300 866 315 66430**

**Website: [www.mariestopes.org.au](http://www.mariestopes.org.au)**

**Disclaimer**

The information in this document has been provided for information and educational purposes only. NT Health has taken every care to ensure that the information is accurate and up-to-date at the time of publication. Individuals concerned about any personal reproductive or sexual health issues are encouraged to seek advice and assistance from their health care provider.