



The American College of
Obstetricians and Gynecologists



FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS
FAQ168
PREGNANCY

Pregnancy Choices: Raising the Baby, Adoption, and Abortion

- **What are some of the things I should consider before I make decisions about my pregnancy?**
- **What are some things I should consider if I choose adoption?**
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What are some of the things I should consider before I make decisions about my pregnancy?

You will need to think about many factors as you decide. Your health, values, beliefs, and situation will play a role in your decision. You may want to think about

- medical problems you may have—there may be a risk to the fetus or signs that something might go wrong with the pregnancy
- how far along you are in your pregnancy
- how much it costs to pay for **prenatal care**, to raise a child, or to have an abortion
- what your choice will mean for you

What are some things I should consider if I choose adoption?

If you choose adoption, prenatal care is as important as if you were going to raise the child yourself. Be sure to start care early and see your health care provider regularly. After the baby is born, you should talk to your health care provider about **birth control** options. You may have a mixture of feelings when the baby is adopted by new parents—anger, grief, a sense of loss, or a sense of relief and certainty that this was the best decision for you.

What happens during the adoption process?

Shortly after the baby is born, the birth mother (the woman who gives birth to the baby) signs consent papers that end her right to make decisions for the child and gives her permission for the baby to be adopted. If the baby's birth father is known and he admits to being the father, he also must sign the consent forms. He may sign the papers before the baby is born.

After the adopting parents agree to accept the baby and have taken him or her home, they file legal papers asking to adopt the baby. A judge approves the adoption. After a waiting period (from 1 month to 6 months, but sometimes longer), the adoption is final.

What are the types of adoption available?

There are three types of adoptions—open, closed, and semi-open. In open adoption, the birth mother and the people who adopt the baby (adoptive parents) may meet and share names and addresses. The birth father also may be included. In a closed adoption, the birth mother and the adoptive parents do not meet or know each other's names. In a semi-open adoption, the adoption agency will provide the birth mother with information about the baby from the adoptive parents and vice versa, but there is no direct contact between the birth mother and the baby.

An adoption can be arranged by an agency or, in some states, independently. In an agency adoption, most agencies choose the adoptive parents after carefully screening and studying people who apply to adopt a baby. Some agencies let birth mothers participate in this process. Sometimes the baby leaves the hospital with the adopting parents. Sometimes the baby is first placed in foster care.

What happens in independent adoptions?

In independent adoptions, babies are placed in the adoptive parents' home without an agency. This may be done through lawyers, doctors, counselors, or independent organizations. Before the adoption is final, the new parents and the home setting must be approved by the state agency that handles adoptions and by the court.

What are benefits and drawbacks of agency adoption?

One benefit of agency adoption is that the agency often provides counseling, support services, and follow-up after the adoption. There also may be fewer legal problems with agency adoptions. But agencies may not allow adoption by single parents, parents over a certain age, or gay and lesbian parents. Independent adoptions often have fewer rules and may have shorter waiting periods.

Is it possible to receive financial help for the medical and legal fees associated with adoption?

If you arrange an adoption through an agency, ask the agency what kind of financial help—both medical and legal—is offered. If you cannot afford a private lawyer to help you with the adoption, you may be able to find legal aid.

Most, if not all, states allow the adopting parents to pay the birth mother's legal and medical fees. While these and certain other fees, such as counseling, often can be paid for the birth mother, it is not legal for anyone to make money from an adoption.

What is abortion?

Abortion occurs when the developing pregnancy (the fetus) is removed from a woman's *uterus*. When a procedure is done to end a pregnancy, it is called "induced abortion." Most abortions are done in the first 12 weeks of pregnancy.

When do I need to decide about abortion?

The decision to have an abortion should be made as early as possible. Abortion is a personal decision. However, some states require that girls younger than 18 years notify their parents or guardian or get permission from a court of law in order to have an abortion.

How is abortion performed?

Induced abortion can be done in several ways. Some abortion procedures are done by surgery. Some are done with medication. Early surgical and medical abortions can be done safely in a health care provider's office or clinic. In some cases, you can take the medications on your own at home. Later abortions usually are done in a hospital or clinic.

What are the risks associated with abortion?

Risks and complications of abortions relate to how long a woman has been pregnant. The earlier a woman has an abortion, the safer it is. Although an abortion is a low-risk procedure, some abortions are a form of surgery. As with any surgery, problems, even death, may occur. Having an abortion does not increase a woman's risk of cancer.

What follow-up care is involved with abortion?

You should have a follow-up visit with your health care provider about 2 weeks after the abortion to make sure that you are healing properly. You also should discuss birth control options at this visit.

What are my options if I change my mind about adoption?

If you were going to have and raise the child and then decide against it, you still can think about adoption. You can begin adoption procedures after the baby is born. This is true even if you did not make this choice before the baby was born.

If you decide to have the baby adopted and then change your mind after signing the consent papers, check your state's laws and talk to your lawyer or the adoption agency. In some states, the consent or permission cannot be changed. In other states, the birth mother can change her mind up to 30 days or, in some cases, even longer after she signs the consent forms.

What are my options if I change my mind about abortion?

If you decided to have the baby and later want to have an abortion, you need to discuss it with your health care provider. After a certain point, it may be too late to have an abortion. The longer a woman waits to have an abortion, the more risk it carries for her.

You can change your mind about having a surgical abortion up until the time the procedure is done. With medical abortion, you should be willing to continue the abortion once the medication has been taken. The baby may be at risk of problems if a woman decides to have the baby after beginning to take the medication.

Glossary

Birth Control: Methods to prevent pregnancy.

Prenatal Care: A program of health care for a pregnant woman before the birth of her baby.

Uterus: A muscular organ in the female pelvis that contains and nourishes the developing fetus during pregnancy. Also called a “womb.”

If you have further questions, contact your obstetrician–gynecologist.

FAQ168: Designed as an aid to patients, this document sets forth current information and opinions related to women’s health. The information does not dictate an exclusive course of treatment or procedure to be followed and should not be construed as excluding other acceptable methods of practice. Variations, taking into account the needs of the individual patient, resources, and limitations unique to institution or type of practice, may be appropriate.

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