

Abortion: Risks and Complications

Abortion is extremely dangerous for the unborn child involved in the process, but it also has dangers for the woman obtaining the procedure. Like all medical procedures, abortion carries with it a certain amount of risk and the possibility of complications. The following list of possible complications from induced abortion is from the National Abortion Federation's (NAF) website, one of the nation's largest abortion providers: (Source: http://www.prochoice.org/about_abortion/facts/safety_of_abortion.html)

Possible Complications of Surgical Abortion

- Blood clots accumulating in the uterus, requiring another suctioning procedure.
- Infections, most of which are easily identified and treated if the woman carefully observes follow-up instructions.
- A tear in the cervix, which may be repaired with stitches.
- Perforation (a puncture or tear) of the wall of the uterus and/or other organs. This may heal itself or may require surgical repair or, rarely, hysterectomy.
- Missed abortion, which does not end the pregnancy and requires the abortion to be repeated.
- Incomplete abortion, in which tissue from the pregnancy remains in the uterus, and requires a repeat suction procedure.
- Excessive bleeding requiring a blood transfusion.
- Death

Possible Complications of Medical Abortion

- Failure of the medications to terminate the pregnancy
- Incomplete expulsion of the products of conception, requiring a suction procedure to complete the abortion
- Excessive bleeding, requiring a suction procedure, and rarely, transfusion (The NAF's Factsheet, *Management of Side Effects and Complications in Medical Abortion: A Guide for Triage and On-Call Staff* states, "Episodes of heavy bleeding are common during medical abortion. Triage and management of bleeding complaints will probably be the most demanding task for clinical staff involved in these services.")
- Uterine infection, requiring the use of antibiotics
- Death secondary to toxic shock following infection with *Clostridium sordellii*

How common are complications?

According to the NAF, the preceding complications occur in .0006% – 6% of patients depending on the particular complication and procedure that took place. However, individuals who have investigated the reporting habits of the abortion industry claim that underreporting of complications does occur. For example, from 1986 -1990 Life Dynamics uncovered a pattern of the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) not accounting for 1-4 abortion deaths annually.

(Compare <http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/ss4804a1.htm> with http://www.lifedynamics.com/Pro-life_Group/Pro-choice_Women/)

What emotional or psychological complications can occur after having an abortion?

The American Psychological Association (APA) denies the existence of “Post Abortion Stress Syndrome (PASS)” or other patterns of negative psychological effects after abortion. PASS is not included in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders IV (DSM IV). However, in 1994 abortion was removed from DSM III where it was listed as a stress trigger for post-traumatic stress syndrome (PTSD). No research was published during this time about post abortion stress so it is unclear why abortion was removed as a stress trigger for PTSD.

In 2006 Dr. David Ferguson conducted a longitudinal study of 630 women in New Zealand. He concluded that women ages 15-25, “. . . *having an abortion had elevated rates of subsequent mental health problems including depression, anxiety, suicidal behaviors and substance use disorders.*” His study also took into account history of abuse, mental illness, and life situations, which could have confounded the results. This is significant because the age group in this study obtains over half of all abortions in the United States. (Source: Ferguson, D.M., Horwood, L.J., & Ridden, E.M. (2006). Abortion in young women and subsequent mental health. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 47(1), 16-24.)

Ferguson, who describes himself as pro-choice, criticized the APA for publicizing studies on its website that claim abortion causes little or no psychological trauma while omitting studies that show the opposite. In an article in the *Washington Times* he remarked, *"It borders on scandalous that one of the most common surgical procedures performed on young women is so poorly researched and evaluated. If this were Prozac or Vioxx, reports of associated harm would be taken much more seriously with more careful research and monitoring procedures."* In the article Dr. Nancy Felipe Russo of the APA responded, *"to pro-choice advocates, mental health effects are not relevant to the legal context of arguments to restrict access to abortion."* Russo went on to say that the APA supports abortion because it is a civil right. (Source: Warren Throckmorton, "Abortion and Mental Health." *Washington Times*, January 21, 2006.)

Along with Ferguson’s study, other studies show that some women exhibit the following symptoms after having an abortion: guilt, anxiety, flashbacks, worry about future pregnancies, issues with emotional relationship to children, alcohol and drug abuse, depression, and suicidal thoughts.



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