

# **ABORTION AND WOMEN'S HEALTH**

An evidence-based review for medical professionals of the impact of abortion on women's physical and mental health.

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# Contraceptives: What You Need To Know

## Birth-control ('contraception') methods which can cause abortion

Can birth control cause an abortion, by stopping an unborn child from implanting in the womb?<sup>1</sup> Many women and couples are unaware that even those methods aimed at stopping ovulation (the release of an egg) can also cause an abortion if an embryo is conceived after 'breakthrough' ovulation. The risk of causing an abortion applies to the following methods of contraception:

### *Combined oral contraceptives*

These pills contain oestrogen and progestin and are taken daily. They:

- suppress ovulation
- thicken cervical mucus
- change the endometrium (lining of the womb) making implantation of the newly-conceived embryo less likely, **and thus can cause an early abortion**

- reduce sperm transportation in the woman's fallopian tubes.

### *Progestin-only pills (the 'mini-Pill')*

These are taken daily and contain no oestrogen. The pills:

- suppress ovulation
- thicken cervical mucus
- change the endometrium making implantation less likely, **and thus can cause an early abortion**
- reduce sperm transportation in fallopian tubes.

### *Combined injectable contraceptives*

These monthly injections of oestrogen and progestin include products such as Cyclofem, Novafem, Mesigyna, Lunelle and Cyclo-Provera. They:

- suppress ovulation



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# Milestones of Early Life

At no time in your life does more growth and change occur than in the first nine months before birth. Here are the amazing milestones of that time in your life:

**Day 1**  
(14 days LMP)

Size of baby:  
→ .005 in.

**Conception:** Of the 200,000,000 sperm that try to penetrate the mother's egg cell, only one succeeds.<sup>2</sup> At that very moment, a new and unique individual is formed. All of the inherited features of this new person are already set – whether it's a boy or girl, the color of the eyes, the color of the hair, the dimples of the cheeks and the cleft of the chin. He or she is smaller than a grain of sugar, but the instructions are present for all that this person will ever become.

The first cell soon divides in two. Each of these new cells divides again and again as they travel toward the womb in search of a protected place to grow.<sup>3</sup>

**Day 6-14**  
(20-28 LMP)

→ .006 in.

The new individual at first attaches loosely to the wall of the womb, then burrows deeply and attaches securely to it over the next week. Sensitive pregnancy tests can now show positive, but this depends on the level of hormone produced by the new life. By the end of the second week, the mother's menstrual period is suppressed by this hormone (hCG) which is produced by her child.<sup>4</sup>

**Day 17**  
(31 LMP)

→ .008 in.

Blood vessels begin to form.<sup>4</sup> Remarkably, the future sex cells that will give rise to sperm or eggs for a new generation begin to group together - only 17 days after this new life is alive itself.<sup>5</sup>

**18-20**  
(32-34 LMP)

The foundations of the brain, spinal cord, and nervous system are laid.<sup>6</sup>

**Day 21**  
(35 LMP)

Size when the heart first beats:  
→ .03 in.

The heart begins to beat,<sup>7</sup> unsurely at first, gaining strength day by day. The heart beats 70 times per minute at first, reaching a maximum of 170-190 at seven weeks, and slowing a bit to 160-180 at 9 weeks.<sup>8</sup> A day later the eyes begin to develop. The earliest stages of the ears are now present.<sup>9</sup>



**Day 26-27**  
(40-41 LMP)

The lungs now begin to form.<sup>10</sup>

**Day 28-32**  
(42-46 LMP)

1/4 inch long

Two tiny arms make their appearance and budding legs follow two days later.<sup>11</sup> The beginnings of the mouth take shape.<sup>12</sup> The nose starts to develop.<sup>13</sup> The thyroid gland begins to grow. Blood flows in the baby's veins but stays separate from the mother's blood. The tongue now begins to form. The face now makes its first appearance.<sup>14</sup>



6 weeks (8 weeks LMP) ectopic pregnancy, Robert Wolfe

**Day 36**  
(50 LMP)

The baby's eyes develop their first color in the retina (see photo above, right).<sup>15</sup>

**Day 40**  
(54 LMP)

The baby makes her first reflex movements. Touching around the mouth with a fine bristle causes her to flex her neck.<sup>16</sup>

**Day 41**  
(55 LMP)

The fingers begin to form, followed by the toes a few days later.<sup>17</sup>

**Day 42**  
(56 LMP)

1/2 inch long

The baby develops nerve connections that will lead to a sense of smell. The brain is now divided into 3 parts – one to experience emotion and understand language, one for hearing and one for seeing.<sup>18</sup> Joints begin to form.<sup>19</sup> Mother now misses second period.

**Day 44**  
(58 LMP)

Buds of milk teeth appear. Facial muscles develop.<sup>20</sup> Eyelids begin to form, protecting the developing eyes.<sup>21</sup> Elbows take shape. Internal organs are present, but immature. 99% of muscles are present; each with its own nerve supply.<sup>22</sup>

**Day 52**  
(66 LMP)

1 inch long

Spontaneous movement begins. The baby then develops a whole collection of moves over the next 4 weeks including hiccupping, frowning, squinting, furrowing the brow, pursing the lips, moving individual arms and legs, head turning, touching the face, breathing (without air), stretching, opening the mouth, yawning, and sucking.<sup>24</sup>



7 weeks (9 weeks LMP)

**8 weeks**  
(10 weeks LMP)

1 1/2 inch long  
.03 oz. in weight

Note:  
all lengths are GL or "greatest length" which does not include the legs

The baby is now well-proportioned, and about the size of a thumb. Every organ is present. The liver is making blood, the kidneys function, and the heart beats steadily.



8 weeks (10 weeks LMP)

The skull, elbows, and knees are forming. Of the 4500 structures in the adult body, 4000 are already present.<sup>25</sup> The skeleton of the arms and legs and the spine begins to stiffen as bone cells are added.<sup>26</sup>

**9 Weeks**  
(11 weeks LMP)

1 1/2 inches long  
.6 oz. in weight

If prodded, the baby's eyelids and hands close. Genitalia that were forming in the 7th week now become visible, indicating whether it's a boy or girl. However, the doctor won't be able to tell by ultrasound until the 12th to 20th week. Early muscular movements begin. The thyroid gland turns on.<sup>27</sup>

**10 Weeks**  
(12 Weeks LMP)

2 inches long  
.8 oz. in weight

Fingerprints begin their 7 week long formation. The fingernails begin to develop. The eyelids now fuse together until month 7, protecting the delicate eyes.<sup>28</sup> The number of connections between nerves and muscles has tripled since last week.<sup>29</sup>

**11 Weeks**  
(13 Weeks LMP)

2 1/2 inches long  
1.4 oz. in weight

The baby now "practices" breathing, since she will have to breathe air immediately after birth. The baby urinates. Her stomach muscles can now contract.<sup>30</sup> Vocal chords and taste buds form.<sup>31</sup> She can make complex facial expressions and even smile.<sup>32</sup>



11 weeks (13 weeks LMP)

**12 Weeks**  
(14 Weeks LMP)

3 inches long  
2 oz. in weight

Fine hair begins to grow on the upper lip and chin and eyebrows.<sup>33</sup> The baby swallows and responds to skin stimulation.<sup>32</sup>



12 weeks (14 weeks LMP)

**13 Weeks**  
(15 Weeks LMP)

4 inches long  
3 oz. in weight

The face is prettier, and facial expressions may resemble the parents'. The baby is active, but mom doesn't feel anything yet.<sup>34</sup>

**15 Weeks**  
(17 Weeks LMP)

A wild production of nerve cells begins and continues for a month. A second surge will occur at 25 weeks.<sup>35</sup>



14 weeks (16 weeks LMP)