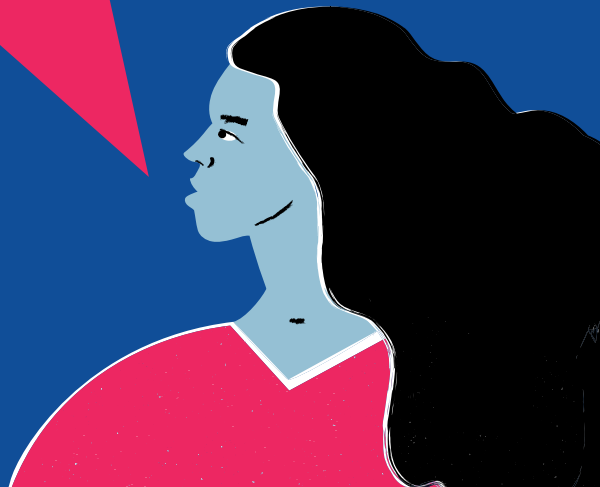


ABORTION POCKET GUIDE



1. WHAT IS ABORTION AND WHY SHOULD WE TALK ABOUT IT?

Abortion, or pregnancy termination (the two terms can be used interchangeably), is a procedure of induced miscarriage before the pregnancy ends in giving birth. In this document, you will find information about the different types of abortion, its legal framework and practices in Hungary, the options for safe pregnancy termination, the role of prevention and sexual education affecting the number of abortions, and you can also find answers to the most frequent abortion related misconceptions.

Access to safe pregnancy termination is a basic human right. Abortion is a necessary medical intervention that protects women from carrying out a pregnancy out of compulsion.

Safe pregnancy termination procedures will always be needed. The more diverse, and the safer and cheaper contraceptives are available for both men and women, the less number of abortions will be carried out due to unwanted pregnancies being avoided. However, abortion is not going to completely disappear until sexual abuse and coercion on women exist, until contraceptives are not 100% effective and free, and the female reproductive mechanisms are not fully understood by medicine. Let's not place our bets on which one of these will happen sooner.



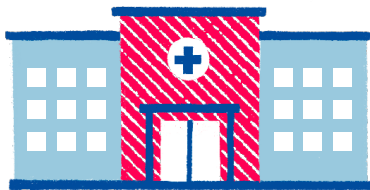
2. TYPES OF ABORTION

Currently there are two types of abortion practices that are safe¹, and which one is actually used depends on the regulations of the specific country, the term of the pregnancy and the decision of the pregnant women.

The two types available are surgical abortion and medical abortion. There is no difference between the two in terms of the physical and mental consequences and the risk of complications is very low in both cases.

2.1 SURGICAL ABORTION

Surgical abortion, also known as in-clinic abortion or suction aspiration can be safely done in the first trimester of the pregnancy as well as in the later stages. The procedure is done by a trained surgeon in the department of obstetrics and gynecology of a hospital. After the dilatation of the cervix, a suction instrument (vacuum aspirator) is used to remove the content of the uterus. The procedure takes about 15 minutes, which is followed by a few hours long stay in the hospital for observation.



¹ This chapter presents the generally accepted safe forms of abortion, not addressing the Hungarian situation specifically. The next chapter focuses on the specific Hungarian aspects, where we discuss that in Hungary, only the in-clinic (surgical) abortion is available.

2.2 MEDICAL ABORTION

According to the most recent clinical guidelines², medical abortion can be safely done until the 12th week of pregnancy, and it is very effective in termination of early term pregnancies³. In order to ensure a safe termination, the combination of two drugs is necessary: Mifepristone and Misoprostol. Both of these pills are listed on the World Health Organization's Essential Medicines List and are available and used globally more and more frequently.

Medical abortion is done in two stages. Both medicines can be used without close supervision of a doctor and outside of the hospital, for example at home of the pregnant woman. Mifepristone should be taken which blocks the production of progesterone, this will stop the progression of the pregnancy. After at least 24, but not more than 72 hours later the second medicine, Misoprostol should be taken. They are administered sublingually or buccally⁴. This drug starts a process that is very similar to a natural miscarriage, which means strong bleeding and cramps, and as a result the uterus empties. Since the abdominal cramps can cause serious pain, taking painkillers may be necessary.



² World Health Organisation, 2022: Abortion Care Guideline

³ 95-99% effectiveness

⁴ The pills should be kept in the oral cavity without swallowing them until they dissolve, best between the gums and cheeks.


2.3 COMPARISON

In the following chart we would like to offer a practical comparison of surgical abortions in Hungary, and medical abortions in an Austrian clinic. At the moment, medical abortion is not available in Hungary, that's why it is necessary to show the guidelines of a foreign clinic.

Neither of these methods are better or worse than the other, and both can be safely done according to the current state of medical science. The most important thing is that the woman should be able to decide which procedure she thinks is the best for her. As in many other situations, women should be given the opportunity and agency to decide for themselves and pick the procedure they deem the best, safest and most feasible.

While surgical abortion is a short procedure with little bleeding and quick recovery, the hospitalization, the anesthesia, and the vulnerability to doctors can be a terrifying experience for many women. Medical abortion is a longer process that includes more pain and bleeding that may even last for several weeks, however, the fact that a woman can do it in the safety of her own home, with someone she trusts, and with full control over her body, makes this option preferable for many of them.



	SURGICAL ABORTION IN HUNGARY	MEDICAL ABORTION IN AUSTRIA
	Up to the 12 th week of the pregnancy	Up to the 63 rd day of the pregnancy (approximately the 9 th week)
	In a designated hospital with a department of obstetrics and gynecology	The first stage happens in a clinic (taking the Mifepristone), the second stage (taking the Misoprostol) happens 24-72 hours later, at home
	The procedure takes 10-15 minutes and the hospital stay is usually one day long	The process starts with the first pill and lasts until the end of the bleeding following the second pill (the heaviest bleeding usually starts 3-4 hours after taking the second pill), so it takes around two days in total
	Nausea caused by the anesthesia and mild abdominal cramps after the surgery	The second pill may cause flu-like symptoms (light fever, chills, headache), which usually stops after 3-4 hours

3. MYTHS AND FACTS

MYTH

„Restricting abortion prevents population decline.” //

If abortion is banned, more children will be born.

FACT

Abortion bans do not lead to population growth, since abortion bans do not affect women's desire and willingness to have children or their need for pregnancy termination. In countries where abortion was banned, the number of births did not increase as a result of the ban. A very good example of this is Poland, where in 2021 the number of births has been at its lowest since 1950. Compared to the previous year, the number of births in Poland decreased by 6.7 percent, even though the country's abortion regulations are exceptionally strict even on the European level.⁵

Although it is often argued that the population of Hungary increased as a result of the abortion ban in the 1950s, after World War II the increase in the desire to have children was a general demographic phenomenon in many European countries and in the United States as well. Women and couples who postponed childbearing during the World War and the reconstruction that followed, conceived children in the 50s and 60s. In other words, the increase was not caused by the strict abortion ban of the Ratkó era, but by postponed childbearing.

⁵ Number of live births in Poland from 1950 to 2021
www.statista.com/statistics/957086/poland-number-of-live-births

MYTH

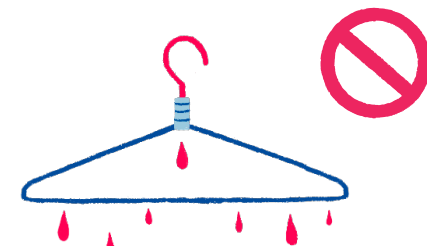
„Abortion bans reduce the number of abortions.” //

If abortion is banned, there will be fewer abortions.

FACT

An abortion ban does not reduce the number of abortions; it only increases the number of illegal and unsafe abortions. When women choose to terminate a pregnancy and do not have access to legal forms of abortion, they are forced to self-induce the termination of the pregnancy or resort to illegal abortion practices, often performed by untrained health workers in unsanitary conditions.

Comparing abortion rates in different regions of the world, the rates are roughly equal regardless of how permissive the law is. At the same time, there are dramatic differences between regions with permissive and restrictive regulations in terms of the extent to which women have access to safe abortions, i.e., to abortions done with appropriate expertise, equipment and conditions.⁶



⁶ World Health Organization: Abortion, www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/abortion

MYTH

„There are women who use abortion as birth control.” //

The so-called „convenience abortion”, when women request abortion only because they did not feel like using contraceptives. //

Anyone who chooses abortion is irresponsible.

FACT

In 2016, the Hungarian Central Statistical Office (KSH) published statistics on women with access to abortion in Hungary. This shows that 26% of women who have had an abortion are childless, and 74% already have children. So women who terminate their pregnancies are already mothers, and they know exactly what it is like to carry a pregnancy to term and to raise a child. In addition, the proportion of women who had repeated (had two or more abortions) has almost halved since 1990. This means that the number of women who have multiple abortions has dropped significantly.⁷

Furthermore, as it became clear from the previous chapters, it is very naive to think that it is easier for a woman in Hungary today to have an abortion than to use contraception. The current regulations make this an unpleasant and humiliating procedure. If the choice really existed for all women, no one would have to choose abortion.

If a woman regularly goes through abortions, it can be assumed that she has no control over her own body and reproduction. This may be because she has not received adequate sexual education, she does not know how her body works, she does not have access to a suitable contraceptive device and/or her partner is unwilling to use protection, or she is in an abusive relationship. If a doctor observes this, it is their duty to recognize the woman's vulnerable situation and help her.

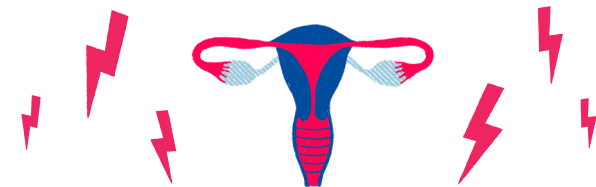
⁷ CSO, “Pregnancy terminations”: www.ksh.hu/docs/hun/xftp/idoszaki/pdf/terhessegmegsz16.pdf

MYTH

„Abortion is a dangerous intervention, it strongly affects subsequent fertility, pregnancy and childbirth, and causes breast cancer”

FACT

Based on the currently available research, an abortion performed by qualified medical personnel in an appropriate manner and under hygienic conditions does not increase the risk of infertility and ectopic pregnancy⁸, and there is no correlation between the development of breast cancer and abortion⁹. Research conducted with appropriate methodology has found no association between vacuum aspiration before the 12th week and subsequent infertility or fetal abnormalities. According to the UN World Health Organization, professional abortion is one of the safest health interventions available. Looking at the statistics, we can see that in developed countries, while the death rate of childbirth is 1 in 15,000 (that is, 1 in 15,000 women dies in childbirth)¹⁰, the death rate of a safely performed medical abortion is less than 1 in 100,000.¹¹



⁸ Frank, P., McNamee, R., Hannaford, P. C., Kay, C. R., & Hirsch, S. (1993). The effect of induced abortion on subsequent fertility. *British journal of obstetrics and gynaecology*, 100(6), 575–580.

⁹ Safe abortion: technical and policy guidance for health systems: www.apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/70914/9789241548434_eng.pdf?sequence=1

¹⁰ Maternal mortality, WHO: www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/maternal-mortality

¹¹ Abortion related mortality: www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4554338

MYTH

„Abortion is always a traumatic experience, which leads to psychological distress, and to „post-abortion syndrome“.

FACT

Many feelings can come with abortion: some women feel sadness, some feel relief, and positive and negative emotions can even appear at the same time. For some women, abortion can be a traumatic experience due to the fact that abortion is a taboo topic in society and it is attached to many misconceptions and stigma, so women who decide to terminate their pregnancy often do not receive adequate, empathetic support during the process. Many of them are treated with disrespect during the two mandatory consultations before the abortion.¹²; in addition, the attitude of friends and family, the judgment of acquaintances and the public, can also contribute to abortion being a traumatic experience. At the same time, sadness and negative feelings related to abortion do not mean that women have regretted their decision - according to research conducted in 2020, 95% of women still believe 5 years after the abortion that they made a good decision¹³.

The existence of the so-called „post-abortion syndrome“ could not be supported by any scientific, comprehensive research so far. Reliable scientific studies have shown that there is no significant difference in the development of the long-term psychological state of

¹² According to the PATENT Association's 2014 research, during the two mandatory counseling sessions before the abortion, the interviewees participating in the research were harmed in 13% of the cases (influence, blaming, emotional pressure); moreover, about half of the respondents did not receive the required quantity and quality of information. The research is accessible here: www.abortusz.info/kutatas/2014

¹³ Five years after abortion, nearly all women say it was the right decision, study finds: www.ucsf.edu/news/2020/01/416421/five-years-after-abortion-nearly-all-women-say-it-was-right-decision-study

women who have undergone an abortion and those who have not. Quite a few scientific studies have drawn attention to the fact that the detection of post-abortion syndrome is also flawed because the mental state before the abortion is not considered, so the mental problems of the woman after the intervention are solely attributed to the termination of the pregnancy; furthermore, they point out, that such studies do not reflect the above-mentioned environmental factors.¹⁴

MYTH

„Abortion is legal in Hungary, it is available to all women, we don't have to address it, and everything is fine here.“

FACT

Although Hungarian abortion regulations are relatively permissive on paper, in practice women who decide to terminate a pregnancy need to face a lot of difficulties. Before the surgery, they must attend two mandatory counseling sessions, during the first of which the employee of the family protection office will try to persuade them to continue the pregnancy.

The legal aid service of Patent Association receives complaints more and more frequently that it is getting hard to book a timely appointment for consultations, so someone can possibly miss the 12-week deadline. Another complicating factor is that abortion is not free in Hungary: the fee for pregnancy termination in 2022 was 41.667 HUF, and governmental support is available only in specific cases.

¹⁴ Abortion and Mental Health: Myths and Realities: www.guttmacher.org/gpr/2006/08/abortion-and-mental-health-myths-and-realities

ABOUT PATENT ASSOCIATION

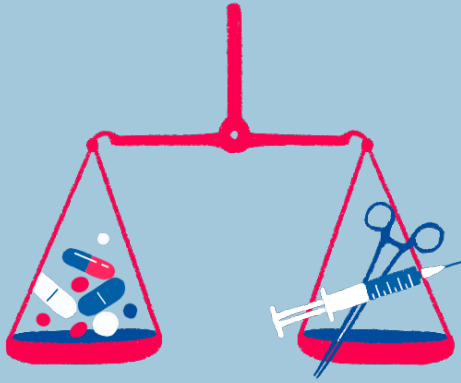
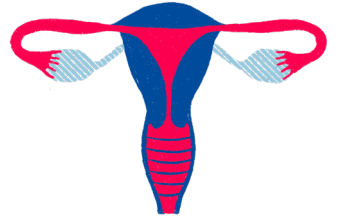
PATENT (Society Against Patriarchy) Association was founded in 2006. The Association consists primarily of professionals, lawyers and representatives of the helping professions trained in fields related to violence against women and children and reproductive rights, and primarily deals with legal assistance, drafting proposals and opinions, and research.

In 2010, as a result of worrying state-level trends, PATENT Association began to deal more seriously with the topic of sexual and reproductive rights and health, especially with the protection of the right to abortion. This is how we became the only legal protection organization in the country that approaches and protects the issue of abortion with a women's rights' and feminist perspective. Since then, we have conducted three studies on the topic and launched several campaigns to protect women's right to self-determination. In addition, we prepare informational and awareness-raising materials and, in cooperation with various Hungarian and European organizations, carry out advocacy activities to protect the right to access to abortion.

Our free legal helpline is available at **+36 80 80 80 81** on Wednesdays from 4:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m. and on Thursdays from 10:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m.

It is also possible to request legal assistance through a Facebook message: our legal aid staff usually responds to inquiries received on Messenger within a week.





**RESTRICTING ABORTION
IS A FORM OF VIOLENCE
AGAINST WOMEN!**

